

Lightning WARRIOR

ITSKRIGI OF THE SECOND WORLD

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Great Patriotic War: Unknown War

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At the beginning of World War II, after the brilliant blitzkriegs of the Wehrmacht in Poland and France, it seemed to everyone that there was no escape from the German tactics of "blitzkrieg", that the Germans managed to find the "key to victory", to find a universal means of armed struggle, allowing them to ` Timing to crush any opponent. However, already in the autumn of 1941, on the Eastern Front, the "blitzkrieg" strategy failed for the first time. Further miscalculations by the German command did not allow the Wehrmacht to fully realize tactical superiority, and the "anti-blitzkrieg" on the Kursk Bulge, which became the grave of the Panzerwaffe, predetermined the outcome of the war. Meanwhile, the Red Army adopted combat experience from the enemy, mastering his tactics. And if Stalingrad, "Bagration" and the Vistula-Oder operation, strictly speaking, cannot yet be called classics of blitzkrieg, then the Manchurian strategic offensive operation of 1945 became a model of "blitzkrieg". A new book by a leading military historian! A fresh look at the strategy and tactics of blitzkrieg. Deep analysis of the main offensive operations of World War II. The true story of the "blitzkrieg".

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Blitzkrieg from a bird's eye view

Today, the military is very fond of speculating that the era of wars of either the fifth or even the sixth generation has come. I'm not going to argue with that, it's probably true. However, I would like to offer my own, more general classification. You should not blame me for the fact that, they say, an amateur appeared and begins to build something of his own, generally absurd. The variant proposed by me does not contradict this standard one at all. We will try to divide all wars into larger groups that include all five, six, seven, or how many generations there are.

This thought prompted me to take a closer look at the nature of the Second World War. It is distinguished by one feature that most historians take for granted, and therefore simply do not notice. And it's completely in vain, because it is this feature that sharply distinguishes the Second World War from all previous wars, even from the First World War. In the 20 years that have elapsed between the two world wars, the nature of hostilities has changed much more than in the previous four thousand years. Of course, the advent of firearms also changed him. But look carefully: how do the ranks of the grenadiers of Frederick the Great differ from the formation of the phalanx of Epaminondas? Nothing! Is there a great difference between the grandiose campaign described in Xenophon's *Anabasis* and the march of Napoleon's Great Army to Moscow and back? Much less than it might seem at first

sight.

However, in the first half of the 1930s, a process begins that changes everything in the most radical way.

All major world powers are embarking on mass mechanization of armies. And this means that when planning operations and battles, one should take into account a factor previously unknown - the mobility of the army. Of course, it appeared before, but it was not so important. The army, weighed down by a huge convoy, moved slowly, without a convoy - a little faster, but in any case, while the soldiers were marching on their own two feet, one should not talk about decisive superiority. After all, you won't seriously assert that the Italians run faster than the Austrians, and the Turks faster than the Russians?! But now mobility and speed of movement are of decisive importance, it becomes possible, on the basis of superiority in mobility, to build a plan of an operation and even an entire campaign. The golden dream of any general - his Cannas, the encirclement and destruction of the enemy army - becomes a reality.

The trench war of the First World War with its battles, monstrous in terms of bloodshed and meaningless in terms of insignificant results ("Verden meat grinder", "August massacre") led to the need to create new means and new methods of warfare. A tank appeared, which, however, did not introduce a radical change in the course of the war in those years. A tank battalion is not tank troops yet.

Fundamental changes took place in the interwar period, when the formation of tank units and formations began in Germany. Hitler, seeing tank maneuvers in Kummersdorf, declared: "This is what I need and what I will have." Although, as we will see later, by 1939, "what I need" did not look very convincing. But the Führer was determined to use even these Panzernedowaffes. After all, there was some chance for a fleeting howl- Well.

Germany still could not afford to wage a protracted war and was forced to build all plans based on the hope of a quick defeat of the enemy, a fleeting,

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lightning war. A lightning war, translated from German into Russian, sounds like a "blitzkrieg". This term first appeared in the *Deutsche Wehr* magazine in 1935 and refers specifically to the "great blitzkrieg" — that is, to a blitzkrieg. In 1938 the magazine *Militer Wochenblatt* defines blitzkrieg as a strategic operation, but as yet all these are unofficial terms. The German military themselves called the "big blitzkrieg" "bewegungskrieg" - "maneuvering war".

But in parallel, another blitzkrieg arises. Heinz Guderian develops and improves the theory of the "small blitzkrieg" - the tactics of tank troops. He relies precisely on maneuver and speed, which will allow him to surround and destroy the enemy.

Let us list the main characteristic features of a blitzkrieg, on the basis of which we will conduct a further analysis of operations.

First: the massive use of tanks, the creation of a shock fist, and not the even spreading of thousands of armored vehicles along the front line.

Second: the interaction of different types of troops - tanks, artillery, motorized infantry, sappers, mandatory support for battlefield aviation. It is and only her! Strategic aviation here is not only useless, but rather even harmful.

Third: breaking through the front at its weakest point.

Fourth: the rapid development of success. Tanks are not delayed to solve tactical tasks, but go out into the operational space.

Nyatoe: the encirclement of enemy forces, followed by their destruction by infantry with the support of artillery and aviation.

In 1945, during the Manchurian Offensive, the Red Army command gave the blitzkrieg a new dimension by including airborne operations. Recall that a similar attempt by the Germans during the offensive in the Ardennes ended in complete failure.

But there was one limitation that followed

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from the state of technology in the 1940s and the level of development of supply systems. Blitz operations have a limited depth - somewhere around 500 kilometers. It is not for nothing that all researchers have repeatedly emphasized that blitzkrieg belongs to operational art, without rising to the level of strategy. When the Germans tried to artificially increase the depth of blitz operations, they fought to the point of defeat near Moscow and Stalingrad.

One more thing. Our historians do not like to write about this, and for quite understandable reasons. One of the main, if not the main condition for a successful blitzkrieg is the absence of resistance from the encircled grouping. So it was in France, near Minsk and Kiev. When encircled troops are beaten back to the last, the rate of advance inevitably slows down or even drops to zero. Or a gap arises between the tank divisions moving forward and the infantry divisions stuck at the pocket, as was the case after Mogilev. However, this should not be blamed on the commanders. As we wrote, until the end of the 1930s military theory did not consider the encirclement of enemy troops at all, and even the questions of counteracting encirclement, and even more so, getting out of encirclement, was out of the question.

This shows that blitzkrieg is just a narrow branch of a larger whole: tank warfare, or rather even its subsection - maneuver warfare. By the way, there are very few operations that meet these strict criteria. Many brilliant operations, such as the Vistula-Oder, fully meet the criteria for maneuver warfare, but they lack encirclement, one of the key points of a blitzkrieg. That is why we do not consider such operations as the counteroffensive of the Red Army near Moscow, the battles around Rostov, accompanied by long marches of Soviet and German troops. The battles for Kharkov in the spring of 1943 are out of consideration. All this is the topic of another book devoted to tank warfare in general. Well, there can be no talk of such seditious items for blitzkrieg as tanks in defense or tanks in urban battles.

Blitzkrieg became one of the most famous creations of the "gloomy German genius" that arose during the Second World War. Only atomic bombings can compete with it. How the theory of blitzkrieg was created and applied, why only the Germans were able to use it most effectively and in full, this book tells.

TALES OF GRANDPA SCHLIFFEN, OR KIEVAN Rus' - THE HOMELAND OF BLITZKRIEG

The idea of a blitzkrieg is not new, one might even say that it is very old. Only it used to look a little different than during the Second World War, and it was also called differently. It first appeared in 1905 within the walls of the Prussian General Staff and was called the Schlieffen Plan.

Here I must immediately make one reservation, with which captious critics may not agree. From my point of view, two interrelated, but not at all identical concepts merge here. The fact is that under the same name "VShektee" the concept of "blitzkrieg", which refers to the field of military-political categories, and the tactics of the operation of tank units in the offensive appear. That is, one blitzkrieg is something that is much higher than strategy, because it affects such areas as the mobilization of human resources, the transfer of industry to a military footing, the organization of diplomatic support for the war, and these are actions at the state level. government policy. And the second blitzkrieg refers to the stereotyped methods of offensive in the regiment-division link, that is, with a very big stretch it can be attributed to operational art and is three or four steps lower than the first blitzkrieg. Further complicating the matter is that there are other similar concepts - mobile warfare and the so-called deep operation. Let's try to figure out who is meg in this confusing story.

So, we return to the very beginning of the twentieth century. A treaty of "cordial agreement" between France and Russia had just been signed, after which Germany immediately found herself in front of

the unpleasant prospect of a war on two fronts. True, the Germans were still blissfully confident that Great Britain would refrain from participating in the European conflict, but the outcome of the war even with the Franco-Russian bloc did not look as certain as the German strategists would like. The only way to avoid a war on two fronts was to swiftly defeat one of the opponents before the second had time to come to his aid. The first victim was determined immediately - France. Even the Prussian General Staff correctly assessed the Russian open spaces, which made a short-lived war impossible.

A short-lived, blitzkrieg war - it was seen by the German generals as a panacea for all problems. They eagerly recalled the recently ended Franco-Prussian war, during which it took them only a few weeks to defeat the French army. However, the same generals somehow forgot that the war did not end with capitulations in Metz and Seldane, because there was still a protracted siege of Paris, the formation of new French armies, new battles. In general, the whole war dragged on for almost a year, and THEREFORE the CONCEPT "lightning fast" did not correspond in any way. In 10 months it was possible to mobilize even the clumsy tsarist army and launch an offensive that could well have been disastrous for Germany. It seemed generally indecent to the Prussian General Staff to discuss the theme of the Russo-Japanese War. After all, all the victories that the Japanese won did not lead to the desired result - the defeat of the Russian army. This was completely wrong from the point of view of military art, and therefore was not subject to consideration and analysis.

Alas, the German warriors thought in old categories, within the framework of purely military doctrines. They did not notice the recent changes in the very nature of the war. Previously, everything was simple: he defeated the army, captured the king (king, emperor, padishah, khan - Substitute the right one), occupied the capital - and, please, the war is over. However, the wars of the second half of the 20th century showed that this was not enough. We still need to crush the economic and political

the enemy's structure, that is, the war turned into a total one. And in a total war, a lightning victory is impossible by definition.

But if a person does not want to put up with some unpleasant fact, he simply does not notice it. This is what the German generals did. They postulated that they would be able to achieve a lightning victory, contrary to the experience of recent wars, and set about developing a new strategic plan.

Alfred von Schlieffen, Chief of the Prussian General Staff, headed the work, so it is natural that the plan was named after him.

Schlieffen easily defeated France on paper, taking 39 days to capture Paris, and generously gave 42 days to surrender. Alas, as is often the case with war planners, he played both sides at once, forcing the paper French to act exactly as he wanted. Worse, the plan did not provide for any deviations from the schedule at all, did not consider any unforeseen accidents, although Napoleon also seems to have said that any plan exists before the first shot. Schlieffen, on the contrary, was sure that his plan would last until the last shot. We will consider the shortcomings of this plan a little later, and now let's talk about those extremely unpleasant things for the Germans that became clear at the first glance at the Schlieffen plan.

The fact is that both the idea of a blitzkrieg and the strategic plan provided for the defeat of the enemy who did not have time to mobilize. That is, Germany a priori became an aggressor. After that, no discussion about the peace-loving character of the German Empire, about the forced defense of its interests, was worth a penny. But more than that, the plan initially provided for the invasion of the territory of neutral states - Belgium, Holland and Luxembourg. And if the German military was still trying to somehow explain the attack on France by the threat of revenge for 1870, then this aggression could not be explained and justified

perhaps nothing. Actually, Schlieffen did not even try. As Napoleon remarked, however, on a different occasion: "Big battalions are always right." The Prussians made this statement a universal explanation. By the way, this is probably why German historians ventured to publish the memorandum "War against France", in which the plan was outlined, for the first time only in 1956.

What was Schlieffen's plan? He planned to concentrate 91% of all the troops of the German Empire on the Western Front and, with a wide enveloping movement of the right wing through Belgium, Holland and Luxembourg, try to reach the rear of the French armies standing on the border. Actually, here was the first weak point of the plan. If you look at the map, it turns out that the French armies are in a semi-encirclement. The situation is unpleasant, to be sure, but not fatal. Schlieffen's plan was silent about everything that followed. More precisely, Schlieffen again postulated that hostilities in the West would end there. What reason did he have for such a conclusion? None.

At the same time, the general had to step on the throat of his own song. The fact is that the main book, the life work of Alfred von Schlieffen, was called "Cannes" and was devoted to battles for the complete encirclement and destruction of the enemy. Unfortunately, the German army simply did not have enough strength to get around the French from both flanks and arrange super-Cannes for them. I had to be content with little, although the cherished dream remained. After the resignation of Schlieffen in 1906, Helmuth von Moltke, Jr., who succeeded him, modified the plan. He weakened the right flank and strengthened the left - and what if it all the same succeeds. He canceled the invasion of Holland - and without that there are enough enemies. At the same time, however, significant forces were saved, which made it possible to compensate for the sending of part of the troops to the left flank. However, the main provisions of the plan were preserved with all their advantages and disadvantages.

The Schlieffen plan, unfortunately for the Germans, was vicious

initially, and had no chance of success, unless the French start playing giveaway. And along with the plan, the idea of a blitzkrieg collapsed. Let us briefly list the factors that led to the deplorable outcome for the Germans, and many of them could have been foreseen in advance. First, the Belgians offered fierce resistance and detained the Germans for a while. Second, the unexpected appearance of the British Expeditionary Force also delayed the advance of the German 1st Army, violating all schedules. Moreover, the army

forced to turn east and instead of bypassing Paris, she exposed her flank to the attack of the garrison of the French capital. Third, the Russians completed their mobilization much earlier than the Germans expected and went on the offensive. Moltke is blamed for sending two corps to the Eastern Front, but what would be the use of semi-encircling the French army if the Russians broke into Berlin at the same time? And such a prospect was quite real. Fourth, the French railways did an excellent job and ensured the prompt delivery of reinforcements to threatened areas. Fifth: the supply problems that arose for the Germans. Schlieffen did not consider this question at all, completely forgetting Napoleon's words: "The secret of war is in the messages." The Germans never managed to establish a normal delivery of supplies, ammunition and reinforcements to the advancing armies. Sixth: the headquarters of the German command was too far from the front line and completely inadequate communication led to the fact that the command lost control of the troops. Each army acted independently, forcedly reacting to the above changes in the situation, but the actions of the armies were not coordinated with each other. Seventh: the plan demanded completely unrealistic rates of advance from the right-flank 1st and 2nd armies. On paper this is acceptable, in reality it is not. It is not in human power to make forced marches for a month in a row. Two days, three, well, a week in case of emergency, but no more.

_ In short, Schlieffen was going to attack in full accordance with the principle of the notorious Colonel Weiro

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ter, expressed back in 1805 before Austerlitz: "The actions of the enemy are not foreseen!" Therefore, it is not at all surprising that the first attempt at a big blitzkrieg failed miserably, and the "miracle on the Marne" is hardly worth such a resounding title. Nothing more than luck. And the failure of the idea of a blitzkrieg meant the inevitable defeat of the Germans, which happened.

As we know perfectly well, the First World War naturally flowed into a whole series of civil wars that proceeded in completely different ways and ended in diametrically opposite results. They gave impetus to the development of the so-called theory of the so-called revolutionary wars, but most curiously, they gave birth to a phantom called "deep operation".

How did all this happen? Of course, after the end of the war, a rethinking of the experience gained and attempts to predict the nature of a future war began. The fact is that during the First World War, the commanders of all countries tried to solve new problems by old means - a massive infantry offensive. However, after the advent of machine guns and barbed wire, this only led to colossal and completely senseless losses. The concentration of a monstrous amount of artillery and a kiloton of shells rained down on the enemy positions did nothing to help the unfortunate infantry, because behind the forward position was the second, third, and so on. Therefore, sooner or later (usually sooner) the infantry still ran into the same insurmountable wall.

The most significant step in helping the infantry was made by the British, who were the first to use tanks. However, having said "a", they never managed to say "b". In the British army, the tank was tightly tied to the infantry, turning into a kind of armored battalion cannon, which should tear barbed wire with its tracks and destroy enemy machine guns with fire. But only! That is, tanks appeared, but the appearance of a tank war was still to be expected for a very long time. Already in 1925

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Field Marshal Haig, who was the first to use tanks in combat, stated: "Some enthusiasts predict that the aircraft, tank and car will replace the horse in future wars. I am entirely for tanks and planes, but they are only an attachment to man and horse.

The theories that were created in other countries in the 1920s did not look any better. And do not blame the military for this. New weapon systems (tanks and aircraft) have not yet come out of wet diapers, and it was simply impossible to guess in them what in the very near future would change all the usual ideas about the nature of war. And this alone makes groundless all claims to the innovation of ideas expressed by Soviet theoreticians - A.A. Svechin, V.K. Triandafilov, M.N. Tukhachevsky. Tanks and aircraft of that time could

perform only auxiliary, subordinate tasks.

Let me take a small digression. Just at this time, an absurd and ridiculous "vintage war" broke out between France and Italy. The Italians issued a series of stamps to perpetuate the achievements of domestic science - airplanes, cars, hydrofoils. The French immediately reacted to the intrigues of sworn neighbors and issued their own series of stamps, proving that they had invented all the same thing, only even earlier. In general, they agreed to the fact that the Gauls flew in airplanes, and the Colosseum was illuminated by electric lamps. Therefore, the phrase "Kievan Rus was from time immemorial the birthplace of the elephant" abroad was put into circulation much earlier than in the USSR, since the Gallic elephant has always been the strongest in the world.

Moreover, if you carefully read the works of Soviet theorists, an interesting detail emerges. Our "blitzkrieg" could not be a blitzkrieg in principle, because the description is of an ordinary all-army operation, in which the main role is still assigned to the infantry. The rate of advance in this so-called "maneuverable" war should not (should not!) exceed 10 km per day, because otherwise it will not be possible to bring up the rear and provide supplies. All these officials

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The Czers stubbornly link the pace of the offensive with the speed at which the railway track is being remade, because armies can only be supplied by rail. By the way, they emphasize the inconsistency of attempts to organize supplies with the help of horse-drawn transport, or simply carts, but they do not say a word about road transport. Their entire motorization is limited to the transfer of artillery from horse-drawn to mechanical traction.

Here is a quote from Griandafilov, which immediately puts everything in its place:

"The use of tanks is connected with the terrain, so they should be directed to the area of the corps that operate on terrain favorable for the operation of tanks. The corps, reinforced by tanks, pass on part of the additional artillery that follows them to their neighbors, who are deprived of the support of tanks. The operation, as will be indicated, will last at least 5-7-10 days. Tanks, by their properties, can work continuously for no more than two days, after which a two-day rest is required to view the mechanisms. Therefore, if tanks are needed not for one breakthrough, but for participation in the entire operation, then the distribution of tank battalions and the procedure for pulling them up to the front should ensure the change of tank battalions of the 1st echelon every two days.

He writes quite clearly that the tanks are attached to the infantry, and not vice versa, as the blitzkrieg theory provides. Moreover, the tank forces are divided into battalions. What kind of blitzkrieg is this?! Further complicating matters is the fact that Triandafilov's book "The Character of the Operations of Modern Armies" is, in fact, almost a complete analogue of the mentioned Schlieffen memorandum, which outlined the basic principles of the war against France. In the same way, Triandafilov tells in detail where, how, and with what forces the closest neighbors of the USSR—Poland, Rumania, and Finland—should be crushed. And general questions of military strategy are given much less attention than they should be.

All of the above should not be considered

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as a reproach to these people. These were educated and thoughtful officers, but they could not do what they could not do in principle. But the leavened patriots who tried to turn their works into

certain revelations given from above deserve the most severe condemnation.

But now, in order to speak more specifically, the time has come to consider the "Vikkteg" itself. This term first appears in the journal *Reshbsiye l'eit* in 1935 in an article that examines the prospects for winning the war by states that do not have a sufficient resource base. The next time he appears in "MIIL" is Josien Ai in 1938, but before the start of World War II, this word was rarely used. The idea of blitzkrieg is based on the use of maneuver, not destruction, as the main way to achieve victory. For this, operations are carried out with close cooperation of all branches of the armed forces. In this case, the main blow is delivered by tanks with the support of motorized infantry, mobile artillery and battlefield aviation. Such tactics require high troop mobility, a dedicated supply force, reliable communications, and a decentralized command structure. The German troops, who used the blitzkrieg tactics, avoided direct clashes, preferring to disrupt communications and encircle the enemy troops, leaving the artillery and aviation boilers to be destroyed. The boilers were supposed to be blocked by infantry reserves, which did not have the mobility of shock units, which in the meantime were moving on. So judge for yourself whether it was possible to develop something similar in the 1920s. There can be only one answer here: no!

However, the Germans still tried. The Reichswehr created a special committee to study the experience of the war, and the chief of staff of the Reichswehr, Hans von Seeckt, proposed a change in strategy, arguing that the classics (Clausewitz, Schlieffen, Moltke Sr.) made a fetish out of the environment. According to von Seeckt, the key point was to be the speed of the offensive, and instead of trying to outflank the enemy, it was necessary to break through the center with one powerful blow

rum. This theory was very much like a "deep operation", but von Seeckt did not even come close to the idea of a blitzkrieg. Therefore, instead of looking for false parallels between the deep operation and the works of Guderian, it is better to compare the work of Svechin and von Seeckt more closely. .

The victorious countries also tried to develop some new theories. One can recall the book of Charles de Gaulle "For a Professional Army", the works of J. Fuller and B. Liddel-Hart. But this is not the place to talk about them in detail, because, touching upon the questions of the organization and actions of mechanized formations, they were also far away from the ideas of blitzkrieg. Moreover, all these authors tried to revive the outdated idea of professional armies, which was completely refuted by the experience of the Second World War. As a curious incident, one can mention the opinion of Winston Churchill, who more than peculiarly imagined the participation of the British army in a future war. He proposed to land "several armored divisions with the most modern weapons" on the continent, supplying them abundantly with small arms for distribution to the local population. Sir Winston has obviously mixed up the eras. His ancestor the Duke of Marlborough could still replenish his army by capturing—that is, by recruiting—peasants in the nearest villages, but to offer this in the middle of the 20th century?! In general, confusion and vacillation reigned in the Allied camp. The French were in favor of distributing tanks among infantry divisions, retaining the same role for them as in the years of the past war. The British still stood for the formation of tank brigades, but at the same time intended to turn them into something like an armored cavalry, completely cut off from other branches of the military. And only the Germans chose the right path.

True attitude. to a person who has made a huge contribution to the development of the theory of blitzkrieg and its practical application, often becomes somehow hysterical. As they say: and then Guderian came and said: "Let there be

light!" I mean blitzkrieg. And he became. And Guderian saw that the tank was good, and separated it from the infantry. And Guderian called the tank the decisive weapon, and the infantry - the support forces ... Okay, let's stop joking and move on to a serious consideration of the tactics developed by Guderian.

Imagine a tank division leading the offensive. Reconnaissance moves ahead of the front, whose task is to probe enemy positions. These reconnaissance units are made up of armored vehicles scouting the main roads and motorcyclists scouring the country roads. They are accompanied by an artillery officer and a communications officer of the Luftwaffe. If necessary, they quickly call for fire support. Having discovered the enemy and reported to the command, the reconnaissance should try to bypass the main positions, acting as quickly as possible in order to maintain the pace of advance. It must maintain constant radio contact with the unit commander, who regulates the pace of the offensive and decides whether the troops should bypass the detected enemy stronghold or destroy it. The commander is also in front and follows immediately behind the vanguard. If he decides to launch an attack, he issues an air order. The troops strike as quickly as possible, right from the march. The attack is carried out on a narrow front with as large a force as possible. |

The center of gravity of the attackers' efforts (Symegripk?) is located in the area chosen by the commander. He must have an overwhelming superiority of forces there—that was Guderian's advice. "Kukep shs! KesKegs." (Hit hard, don't spank!) The purpose of the first attack is to break through the enemy front. Fresh forces immediately pass through the gap, which develop the offensive, bypassing the main positions of the enemy. This tactic aims to bring tank units behind the front line so that they can cut enemy lines of communication.

The strike force is immediately followed by the support force, which consists mainly of motorized infantry. Their task is to eliminate the remaining nodes of enemy resistance, to expand the breakthrough of the enemy

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front, securing the flanks. The expansion of the breakthrough area is necessary in order to maintain a gap in the enemy front. Once again, we emphasize the fundamental difference between blitzkrieg tactics and all other methods: infantry supports the actions of tank units, but not vice versa! After enemy the front, the strike force continues to rush forward, with the goal of encircling the larger forces as possible as a breakthrough. The faster and deeper it penetrates into the enemy rear, the larger the cauldron will turn out, the more chaos and panic will be. Guderian's principle was the development of success. In case of failure, he quickly transferred troops to another sector of the front, where they could be more useful, and did not try to turn the tide of an unsuccessful battle. Such operations required great coherence of heterogeneous forces, good command and reliable communications, and, if possible, surprise. Instead of long preparations, protracted maneuvering and massive artillery bombardment before the attack, which gave the enemy time to prepare to repel the blow, Guderian preferred to create an overwhelming superiority in forces on a narrow sector of the front and deliver a sudden crushing blow. Therefore, it is not surprising that he earned the nicknames bsepeye Net; (Swift Heinz) and Netg Vgaizemeeg (Heinz - Hot Head).

Further. Guderian paid special attention to the efficiency of management. The commanders of tank units must follow in combat formations. However, in this regard, the Germans often went too far. Yes, for the commander of a regiment or division, this is natural. But why did Guderian himself get out to the front line, so much so that he was forced to participate in skirmishes? This is not the task of the army commander. Or why did Rommel personally escort convoys of truckloads of supplies to the semi-encircled units? A sound idea should not be carried to the point of absurdity. Efficiency of control required the establishment of reliable communications, and as early as 1933 Guderian began to demand that every German tank be equipped with a walkie-talkie.

Incidentally, it is precisely these characteristic features of blitzkrieg that make groundless the claims of homegrown patriots who like to claim that the theory of blitzkrieg was developed in the USSR in the 1930s under the name of "deep operation". As we have seen, this is not at all the case either from the point of view of theory or from the point of view of practice. The close interaction of heterogeneous forces could dream of our generals only in sweet dreams. Even in 1945, the state of radio communication in the Soviet Army was quite bad, and even in the period mentioned, it was generally

was at the cave level. So the key element of the blitzkrieg—operational, close interaction of all types of troops during the period when the theory of deep operation was created—was unrealizable by definition.

If we compare the above description with the propositions of Triandafilov and Svechin (we will talk about Tukhachevsky a little later), then a cardinal difference in tactics immediately catches the eye. If blitzkrieg can be likened to a rapier stab delivered to a vital point, then a deep operation revives, albeit on a new level, the infamous "Russian steamroller", which the Germans were so afraid of during the last war. No wonder Triandafilov constantly repeats the phrase that the offensive should be carried out on a front of 100 km or more.

In addition, the notorious deep operation had an even stronger political flavor. It was developed within the framework of the Trotskyist theory of "permanent revolution" and was, so to speak, its military-theoretical part. If you take a closer look at the proposals of Svechin and Triandafilov, you can see that they practically do not consider actions after the breakthrough of the enemy front. Further, the Soviet troops had to simply fulfill the behest of Genghis Khan: "Forward, to the last sea!" In fact, the theory of the "deep operation" was created to justify the possibility of defeating any European country in one, maximum two successive operations

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rii - in which it radically differed from the theory of blitzkrieg, the main point of which was the defeat of the enemy army.

The fact is that after the breakthrough of the German tank units behind enemy lines, the second phase of the offensive began - Kezzesshashy:, that is, the encirclement and destruction of the troops that were in the cauldron. However, less mobile infantry with the help of artillery and aircraft had to do this. Here they are, Cannes, grandfather Schlieffen's sweet dream! However, there was one serious flaw here, which Guderian did not seem to notice. He considered the small blitzkrieg as a purely military tool for the implementation of the big blitzkrieg (we will not consider political and economic aspects). That is, the Germans developed the theory of blitzkrieg to transfer the solution of strategically intractable tasks to the operational plane, while the "deep operation" was supposed to "expand the basis of the war" by "sovietizing" the occupied territories and using their resources for successful end to the war.

But encircling and destroying an army grouping of tens of thousands of people is not exactly the same as slaughtering an infantry regiment. Okay, let's agree - a division. Well-trained, disciplined troops under the leadership of skillful and determined commanders are capable of putting up long and stubborn resistance, which was proved by the Soviet troops in the winter of 1941, and later by the Germans themselves. But the tanks are rushing forward, and as a result, a gap is formed between the mobile tank grouping and the stuck support units. Any blow to this gap could lead to catastrophic consequences. That is, oddly enough, the label of the Soviet era is absolutely true - the blitzkrieg strategy is a gamble. Therefore, blitzkrieg worked perfectly against panic-stricken or unwilling troops. Then "tank fear", "boiler fear", other varieties of bear disease appear, and the liquidation of the boiler is not delayed. Then

legend.

The first to advertise the blitzkrieg were, of course, the American

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ricans. While this term remained purely German, few people heard about it. But here is the Gaim magazine in September 1939, describing the German invasion of Poland:

"The front line is gone. It looks like it didn't exist at all. It was not a war of occupation, but a war of rapid breakthrough and annihilation—a blitzkrieg, a lightning war. Swift columns of tanks and armored personnel carriers rushed through Poland, and bombs raining from the sky announced their imminent appearance. They disrupted communication, destroyed domestic animals, dispersed the civilian population, and sowed terror. Sometimes moving 50 km ahead of the infantry and artillery, they destroyed the Polish defense before they had time to organize it. Then, as the infantry moved up, the tanks moved on to strike again behind what was previously called the front."

Well, it's like an apocalypse. So you see the life standard "Adolf Hitler" storming the barn to "destroy domestic animals." But we will forgive the journalists for the colorful style and again we will deal with more serious issues.

It is time to talk about Tukhachevsky's ideas. And what they didn't say about him, what spreading cranberries they didn't hang on their ears! For example, Suvorov-Rezun exposed him in such a way that there were no bones left. Say, a rogue and swindler, rushing to the Bonapartes, stole the deepest ideas of the serious theorists Svechin and Triandafilov, bringing the development of the theory of deep operation to its logical conclusion.

Now, we simply have to ask Suvorov his own question: "Which works of Tukhachevsky have you read?" This is a crushing blow. Operates flawlessly. Like a sledgehammer in the jaw. I have been asking this question to Tukhachevsky's fans for many years... Ugh, I've been carried away. Of course, I wanted to say "Tukhachevsky's opponents". And suddenly, quite unexpectedly, it turns out that the opponents are in the same difficult position as the supporters. They did not read these works. And not from illiteracy or

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laziness. The reason is very simple — such works simply do not exist! |

We are accustomed to anyone that every major military theorist leaves behind, if not some "work of a lifetime",

then at least a serious, voluminous book devoted to

| strategy go tactics. For example, "War in the air" by Giulio Due, "Attention tanks!" Guderian, the same "The nature of the operations of modern armies" by Triandafilov. And what book of Tukhachevsky can you name? Answer: none! The two-volume collection of selected works is nothing more than just a collection. articles evenly spread over 15 years and devoted to the most diverse, unrelated issues. At the same time, very few of them were written in the 1930s, and only one of them was devoted to the problems of modern warfare - "On the New Field Regulations of the Red Army". In it, Tukhachevsky smashes all sorts of Western false theorists like Fuller and Liddell-Harth, does not miss the opportunity to kick domestic deviationists. He even exposes attempts to impose independent use of tanks "in isolation from the main army masses". Seems to be right so far. However, one nuance is alarming. Tukhachevsky not only belittles the role of aviation, he simply does not utter this word! Note that the article appeared in 1937, the same year as Guderian's book. Guderian devotes a special chapter to questions of interaction between tanks and aviation, Tukhachevsky keeps quiet about this. Further more. The tanks are again attached to the infantry and cavalry.

"The success of the actions of a combined-arms formation is possible only if the organization of uninterrupted interaction between the branches of the armed forces. Infantry, cavalry and tanks must be supported by artillery fire in all types of combat. During an offensive, artillery fire must be especially powerful, both in caliber and in the number of guns. Tanks, widely represented in the Red Army, must constantly provide support to both infantry and cavalry. Finally, flexible and reliable interaction between tanks and artillery must be organized.

Like this! Where did you see here. At least a distant resemblance to a blitzkrieg? The mention of the cavalry looks especially humorous. In general, the differences start from the very first point. Blitzkrieg calls for a strike on a weak point, Tukhachevsky talks only about breaking through a pre-prepared defense. Moreover, he states quite unequivocally that in battle the decisive tasks are assigned to the artillery.

"The field manual assigns decisive tasks to artillery: during the period of artillery preparation - suppression of artillery; destruction of detected anti-tank weapons and suppression of areas of their probable location; destruction (suppression) of OP and individual fortifications, especially concrete points that are not affected by tanks; suppression of the machine-gun system in areas that are not attacked by tanks or are not available for their attack.

Well, further, it makes no sense to give all the points. Before us are typical, very much belated arguments, so to speak, wit on the stairs. If all this had been stated before the first British offensive at Cambrai, one might even have admired it. However, 20 years have passed, and the nature of the war has changed dramatically, and Tukhachevsky still thinks in terms of positional warfare.

Even more interesting is the classification of tanks he proposed. We see infantry support tanks (PP) and long-range tanks (DD). Of course, it was worthwhile to denounce the British theorists with such fervor in order to introduce the infantry and cruiser tanks they invented, although wrapping them in new wrappers. Only here's what's interesting. If the same British infantry and cruiser tanks differed sharply in the thickness of the armor, then we, alas, the difference is quite small. The armor thickness of the infantry Matilda [>] reached 60 mm, and the cruising MagkK Sh - only 14 mm. We will not talk about modifications yet. What do we have? Tank DD, i.e. BT-7, - armor 20 mm, tank PP, i.e. T-28, - 30 mm. That is, Tu-, Khachevsky not only pulls into the past, but also offers

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He intends to use some kind of phantom that does not exist in nature.

However, if someone thinks that the situation with the tanks of the Germans was fundamentally better, he is greatly mistaken. In the next chapter, we will consider this issue in more detail. In the meantime, we confine ourselves to the observation that, apparently, the blitzkrieg tactics were a kind of "evidence of poverty", just like the strategy. Indeed, what kind of tanks did the German army have in the mid-1930s? Formidable combat vehicles of the T-Gi T-P types. With them, one should not even dream of breaking through the fortified belts. The most reasonable thing is to look for weaknesses in the defense, after all, the German commanders are not suicidal, are they? Now, if in 1935 they had something like a "tiger" at their disposal, I'm ready to argue, they would immediately be tempted to break through the enemy's defenses without any tricks, so to speak, by force.

Summary. A very simple conclusion follows from what has been said above. Blitzkrieg is a purely German invention. The Anglo-French theories of the use of tanks turned out to be completely wrong, for which these countries paid dearly during the Second World War. Soviet works, with all the outward resemblance to the theories of Guderian, spoke about something completely different. And the Red Army did not have at its disposal proper combat means to implement the ideas of the blitzkrieg.

Chapter 2 THE GREAT TANK SCANDAL

A somewhat strange name, but otherwise it is impossible to characterize the state of the tank forces of almost all countries participating in the Second World War at the moment when they entered this war. And we are not talking about some kind of Italy, whose tanks are not capable of evoking any other feeling than sharp pity. Things were not at all brilliant in the homeland of the blitzkrieg in Ger

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mania and in the peace-loving Soviet Union, which is preparing for the liberation of everyone and everything.

So, by the mid-1930s, all countries recognized the value of the tank as a weapon system, although some still argued that the good old warhorse would still show itself. Books by Fuller, Liddell-Harsh, Eimansberger, Guderian, de Gaulle appeared, devoted to the analysis of the capabilities of the tank and its combat use. However, it would be a strong exaggeration to say that these books had a noticeable influence on the thinking of the corresponding General Staff. They were considered, rather, as intellectual controls, not devoid of, however, limited practical significance. Let me emphasize that it is limited.

The doctrine of Giulio Douet was much more fortunate in this respect. The huge strategic bomber looked much more spectacular than the heaviest (at that time) tank. Moreover, this doctrine corresponded to the mood prevailing in the countries of the West. The monstrous massacres of the First World War (Somme, Verdun and others) psychologically broke a whole generation. This is not a Vietnamese or Afghan syndrome, which affected only participants in wars, the number of which, by the way, was small compared to the millions of armies of the First World War. No, this massacre affected the entire population of the participating countries, and it is not without reason that the idea of small professional armies is experiencing another renaissance at this time. Therefore, the idea of fighting only with aviation forces, without coming into contact with the enemy at all, looked very tempting. Moreover, the possible loss of crews did not seem strange even to the most

desperate pessimists.

The tank, unfortunately, definitely needed an enemy, and not somewhere far away, across the English Channel, but right here, within line of sight. Therefore, it was developed, but somehow sluggishly, out of obligation, or what? What if it doesn't come in handy? But the main factor that influenced the appearance of more than bizarre designs was that all proposals and ideas

remained purely speculative. They did not pass the battle tests, so it was simply impossible to improve the tank based on combat experience. Any weapon system needs to be tested precisely in combat, only then can it be brought to constructive perfection. Did you pay attention to the fact that the infantry of all countries participating in the Second World War was armed with rifles created on the verge of the 20th and 20th centuries? The colossal experience gained in the course of numerous large and small wars led to the creation of ideal designs, and all improvements were only due to new technologies that did not fundamentally change anything. And only the appearance of automatic weapons again forced the designers to get to work. The tank, and even more so the tank troops, did not have such a long history. Here is what happened. T

Of course, the history of blitzkrieg is inseparable from the history of the development of tanks, primarily German tanks, and other weapons systems. A closer examination of these questions makes it clear why in some countries, to be more precise, in one country, the tactics of blitzkrieg appeared, while in others they did not. Moreover, she could not appear there in principle, even at the very end of the Second World War.

Therefore, we will briefly review the state of armored vehicles and tank troops in September 1939, when the Second World War began, and in June 1941, when the Great Patriotic War began. At the same time, we will try to analyze how much both of them were suitable for use for their intended purpose and for the implementation of the ideas of the blitzkrieg. This formulation of the question may seem paradoxical, but there are good reasons for it. It is clear that any military operation requires the interaction of different types of troops, and all the charters of all countries have declared this. However, how many really prepared to establish this very interaction? Or more often. Were there bare declarations that were not backed up by any real measures?

The first real test of modern tanks took place during the Spanish Civil War. Her lessons were carefully analyzed, although these very lessons turned out to be few and the test turned out to be rather one-sided. Tanks were used on a very limited scale, from time to time, so no conclusions can be drawn regarding the tactics of their actions.

managed. But with regard to technology, very, very serious conclusions followed, they radically changed the idea of the capabilities of tanks, and as a result, influenced their design. Moreover, these conclusions, in general, were not unexpected. The only strange thing is that almost everyone, seeing certain shortcomings of the then tanks, did not take any measures.

The famous English theorist Fuller wrote: "I saw three types of tanks in Spain: Italian, German and Russian. But all three were just a cheap mass product, not the result of tactical research.

In my opinion, this war proved that the light tank does not belong to the combat vehicles at all. This is an unimportant armored reconnaissance vehicle that can become very effective if its chassis is lengthened. In its present form, a light tank on rough terrain resembles a destroyer on rough seas. In addition, the interior space for the crew is so small that people feel like they are in a mobile coffin. This is bad for morals."

The French, back in 1937, also expressed their opinion: "German tanks were a major disappointment (crew 2 people, 50 km / h, 2 machine guns, almost useless armor).

No protection from enemy anti-tank guns or small arms bullets. This experience gives the German High Command reason to think seriously.

The German Panzer Division was disgraced even before it had been created.

French tanks, slower but much better armored, remain the "kings of the battlefield."

Optimism is a cheerful attitude, but here the French

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PS clearly sufficed over the edge, as they were to be convinced in the not so distant future.

And here is the memorandum of the German General Staff dated March 30, 1939: "At the end of October 1938, there were 2 tank battalions of 3 companies each. One company in each battalion was equipped with captured Russian tanks. The companies equipped with German tanks had 16 tanks each. |

German machine gun tanks were never used in combat by entire battalions. Usually, tanks were attached to the infantry in small groups and accompanied it, like armored heavy infantry weapons.

In general, tanks were used in Spain in small numbers and without means of support. In general, they were inferior to anti-tank weapons and only occasionally surpassed them, although they were also available only in small quantities.

The 45 mm cannons of Russian tanks fire high-explosive shells along a very steep trajectory. The effectiveness of these shells is unsatisfactory. Armor-piercing shells are fired along a flatter trajectory. Due to the poor quality of steel, the armor penetration of Russian armor-piercing shells is noticeably lower than that of the corresponding German armor-piercing shells. Russian armor-piercing shells can only penetrate 40 mm armor from a distance of 100 meters. In addition, up to 75% of bottom fuses do not work.

At first, people willingly recruited into the tank troops of Franco's army. But after the first losses, when everyone saw what a burnt tank looked like inside, the initial enthusiasm quickly faded. Today, besides enthusiastic volunteers, captured Russian tanks are equipped with pardoned criminals or Spaniards, who are given a choice: prison or tank attack."

But let's consider the most interesting thing for us - the history of German tanks, or, as it has become fashionable to call them now, Rap? egkatrÿmagen. An interesting story turns out with many zigzags, digressions and extremely incomprehensible decisions, which no logic can explain. In general, one gets the impression that the tank troops and the Departa

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The armaments of the ground forces (Heezes U/aJepat!) existed in parallel planes, without intersecting or touching in any way. However, this is a normal situation in the realm of the victorious bureaucracy, regardless of its specific nationality. And even the vaunted German order does not save us from this. The only thing I want to ask is: how did it happen that an officer, moving from a regiment to a department, instantly turned into an inveterate bureaucrat and immediately forgot how he himself scolded these damned chanceries to the fullest extent.

In order not to be unfounded, I will cite excerpts from the memorandum of this very Department of Armaments dated October 30, 1935, after reading which a lot of questions arise.

"M.S. Rapteguarep (Ga.5)

A machine-gun tank armed with two 7.9-mm machine guns is the least suitable for offensive actions of tank units. However, after the creation of special ammunition, it can be used against armored vehicles and tanks protected by bulletproof armor.

M.S. Rapteguarep (2 tbsp)

This tank can successfully fight against armored vehicles. It can also prove itself in combat with tanks that have similar armor protection (14 mm). Against old Renault M17 tanks (armor thickness 22 mm), effective hits can be expected at distances of less than 700 meters.

Against light tanks Renault ÿÿÿÿÿ7 and ÿÿÿ] (armor thickness up to 30 mm), and especially against tanks with 40 mm armor, this tank is practically useless.

Gismeigeguarep (2.\.)

At a distance of 700 meters, a 37 mm projectile can penetrate 22 mm armor. This is enough to fight Renault M#S27 and MSZ1, excluding areas with 30 mm armor.

The appearance of the first experimental tank with a 37 mm gun should be expected in November 1935. Taking into account the expected increase in the thickness of the armor of French tanks, one should try to increase the armor penetration by a factor of

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station 700 meters 6 22 to 27 mm, installing a 37-mm anti-tank gun G./65 instead of ./45.

Veey\vaeep (W.M\.)

The 75 mm gun of this G./21 tank can penetrate 43 mm armor at a distance of 700 meters. If we talk only about armor penetration, the tank is quite equal to the new French tanks.

The muzzle velocity of the projectile can be increased to

combat tanks SRag 2C, 3C, O, but this will lead to the creation of a completely new tank. Based on the calculations, it can be seen that the weight of the tank will increase to 30 tons with an armor thickness of up to 20 mm, which is no longer quite enough to protect against 20 mm projectiles. . To sum up all the above, we can conclude that the tanks created earlier are quite capable of offensive combat, except with the heaviest French tanks. It is necessary that

they were available in sufficient numbers to form formations that would be located close to the front line to compensate for their lack of mobility.

Requirements:

1. You can no longer require the creation of a medium tank weighing about 30 tons with a 75 mm gun with a projectile speed of 650 m/s.
 2. Allow the creation of a 50 mm anti-tank gun capable of penetrating 40 mm armor at a distance of 700 meters.
- Deciding whether tanks should be armed with such a gun

can be postponed.

Awesome! The document states that the armament of German tanks is not capable of fighting the already existing French tanks, the orientation towards shooting the unfortunate Renault M17, which will be a hundred years old in the afternoon, is not serious. But in the future, the appearance of tanks with even thicker armor is expected. But at the same time, nothing should be done. As a last resort, postpone the decision of the issue. Classic bureaucratic approach! Already in 1935, the Germans understood perfectly well that the unfortunate T-G

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not suitable, but how many more years does this machine continue to be produced?! Specifically, until the end of 1938. For what?! Nobody can tell. The Germans still have a reserve of time, four years before the start of the war, and you can manage to do a lot, a lot. However, the issue of re-equipping the T-Sh with a 50-mm cannon is being postponed, and the installation of a long-barreled 75-mm cannon on the T-Sh is generally abandoned. And so it will! As a result, the Panzerwaffe started the war with what they started with, although there were all the prerequisites for a radical replacement of tank equipment models based on existing experience. So our historians blame in vain. Germans in that they did not see the advantages of powerful guns. They all saw! For some reason, they just decided that they didn't need it. The classic mistake of dogmatists is that if something is good today, it will be good tomorrow and will always be good. Alas...

So far, things are not going well with the reliability of German tanks either. In March 1938, T-1 tanks took part in the Anschluss of Austria. General Guderian's 2nd Panzer Division made a 420-kilometer forced march in two days. At the same time, up to 38% of the tanks failed due to insufficient reliability and were left on the roadsides. After this "campaign" Guderian sharply raised the question of improving the system of evacuation and repair of tanks. Here it is, the organization of service in tank units! With the occupation of the Sudetenland of Czechoslovakia in October 1938, the situation improved significantly, although it did not

the happy tankette never did.

So, | September 1939 Germany unleashes World War II by invading Poland. Some argue that by this time the Panzerwaffe was the main striking force of the Wehrmacht, that the Germans were well prepared for the war and took into account all the lessons of Spain. Do not listen to this "someone", he is not your friend, because he is trying to brazenly deceive you. This is the "Kunstkamera" with which smart and methodical Germans started the war: 1445 - T-, 1223 - T-P, 98 - T Hb2I = TU, 202 - 35 (0, 78 - 38 (g) and 215 command tanks Excuse me, but maybe our eyesight is cheating?

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quite recently we saw official documents in which it was written in German in white that machine-gun tanks had absolutely no combat value. And suddenly it turns out that out of 3472 tanks (also, by the way, a terrific figure) 41% are small toys for big boys. Or vice versa - big toys for little boys. And another 35% of the number falls on the tank, which can fight with any tank of the last war, even with the famous Renault M17. True, not always and not everywhere. If we add here command tanks, which are certainly needed, but still do not belong to combat vehicles, then we get

a result that makes you think. 83% of German tanks bear the proud name "tank" due to a real misunderstanding, probably, instead of Rap7erkatremagen [it would be better to call the corresponding model Rapte 5 sWipe 1. In general, a strange conclusion can be drawn: Germany started the war without tank troops. The formidable Panzerwaffe was in fact a fake, a paper tiger. It's just that England and France put up a soap bubble against this paper tiger.

The allies used two diametrically opposed approaches when creating tank forces. The French purely mechanically dragged the experience of the First World War into modern times, deciding that the only task of the tanks was and will be to support the infantry, and in themselves they are of no value. True, the first to form their own tank units was the cavalry, and not the infantry, which included light mechanized divisions. At one time, the Strugatsky brothers introduced a satirical character into The Tale of the Troika – a colonel of motorized cavalry troops – and ridiculed the apocalyptic visions of horse muzzles sticking out over the sides of armored personnel carriers. However, this French division included mechanized dragoons - and nothing.

Later, the French began to form tank divisions. However, we are again faced with the intricacies of translation. Ÿ/ \110Ÿ ŸŸŸŸ\$Ÿ, if desired, can be translated and how

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cuirassier division. But that was not the point. In March 1940, the bulk of French tanks were consolidated into battalions and companies and distributed to infantry divisions. In full accordance with the doctrine. There were tanks - and they were gone, look for fistulas. If we talk only about numbers, then by May 1940 France had an impressive number of tanks: 314 - V-1, 210 - O-1, 1970 - V-35, AMK and AMS, 308 - H-35, 243 - 5-35, 392 - H-38, H-39, B-40, 90 - ECM. In addition to them, there were about 2,000 old E-17 tanks that were stored in warehouses, and up to 800 vehicles were combat-ready. To this should be added about 600 armored vehicles and 3,500 armored personnel carriers. However, the French managed to organize things in such a way that this entire armored crowd had practically zero combat value. By the way, I came across a good word that ideally characterizes the situation - "CROWD".

After all that has been said, it would seem that the easiest way is to smash and criticize the design of French tanks. Some of them are funny. But let's not rush. First of all, the French were the first to build tanks with anti-cannon armor. Before the start of the war in Spain, there were still a few years left, and the thickness of the armor of French tanks had already reached 40 mm or more, while other countries safely managed with 20 mm armor. And it's not for nothing that the Germans in their documents repeat this magical number 40 over and over again. The armor thickness of V-1 tanks has already reached 60 mm, and the Germans did not even think about fighting such monsters. |

And now let's move on to the shortcomings that the French themselves did not consider shortcomings. Low speed? However, the generals believed that even in a new war the rate of advance would not exceed 10 kilometers per day. And in general, if the tank will act in conjunction with the infantry chain, why should it overtake this chain? You can put a more powerful engine, but it will be extra and absolutely useless weight. Two crew members? Why more? The commander himself will see the damned machine gun, which is a hundred meters away, and he will destroy it himself. And there is no need to turn your head around and rush.

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The machine gun stands still and will not run anywhere. There are some doubts about the gun, but here everything is understandable. The low initial velocity of the projectile is not significant, since the shooting will be carried out at extremely short distances. A small caliber facilitates the work of a commander who already has enough worries, but a machine gun and a 37-mm projectile will suffice. In a word, in order to reveal the technical shortcomings of the French tanks, it was necessary to reveal the viciousness of the doctrine that gave birth to them. In the meantime

The French believed that their tanks were quite suitable for the tasks that the army would have to solve. |

And now let's move on to another characteristic design feature of the French tanks of the mid-1930s, which our historians prefer not to notice point-blank. For what? After all, everyone knows that Kievan Rus is the birthplace of the elephant. And the T-34 is the first tank with anti-projectile armor located obliquely. And they began to develop it in 1939, taking into account the experience of the war in Spain. But let me, what about the N-35, ESM-36, 5-35 tanks? Which also have sloped armor, but were created 5 years earlier? The answer is simple - no way. They can and should simply be ignored. |

'We will not be able to talk more about French tanks for a very good reason. Their entire combat career safely fit in a month and a half - from May 10 to June 22, 1940 ...

The English theories of the use of tanks were a completely insane mishmash of absolutely incompatible postulates. As a result, what the British themselves called the "great tank scandal" was born. How the British could fight with such tanks and such military doctrines is incomprehensible. They did not fight, but this is my personal opinion, which I do not impose on anyone. Even Count Ignatiev, in his memoirs "Fifty Years in the Line," said that English gentlemen regard war as a kind of risky, exciting sport. And the views of the Royal Tank Corps fit perfectly into this template. In general, it seems that English

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Russian tankers would gladly replace the battle with some kind of competition at the tank track with target shooting. The concept of the cruiser tank they put forward was an attempt to revive the cavalry on a new level - a cavalry that was valuable and self-sufficient. The concept of an infantry tank was reminiscent of the French, but in a much worse form.

Cruiser tanks also entered service with the former cavalry regiments, which retained the old names: 7th Hussars, 5th Lancers, and so on. In general, the names of the British regiments are a separate song. And what a! Only the British know how to keep traditions like that. Instead of vulgar numbers like 123456789 Tank Regiment, they carefully kept all the medieval names. Black Guard! Rogue queens! Derbyshire Yeomen! Sherwood Forest Guard! Lancashire Fusiliers! At the same time, there are already quite incomprehensible constructions like: At' Koua! KTe Sogrh - King's Royal Rifle Corps. Moreover, it is completely separate from the own king of the regiments - At 5 Omp Keltepv. Unfortunately, all these beauties did not at all increase the combat power of the regiments.

Moreover, the British tanks were simply an unforgettable sight. Here, for example, is the most massive cruising tank MaIK UJ (A15) Sgazadeg. Its main distinguishing feature was the completely unusual shape of the tower, which was not repeated before or after. Of course, the designers found an explanation for the sloping down walls. However, they worked in a way that the designers did not explicitly foresee - forming a kind of "sleep catcher". Any projectile that hit the lower half of the turret was sent straight to its shoulder strap. The consequences were easy to predict. However, the exoticism did not end there. The designers decided to add a machine gun turret next to the driver's seat. This is in 1939!

Infantry tanks looked just as outlandish. For example, "Matilda 1" with a weight of more than 11 tons and armor of 60 mm, which was very good for 1937, was armed with only one machine gun, moreover

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same infantry caliber. The zero value of such weapons was obvious to everyone except the command of the Royal Tank Corps. A weak and unreliable engine generally turned the Matilda [› into a crawling (the word "self-propelled" sounds like a clear exaggeration) machine-gun pillbox. "Today I saw a real miracle - the Matilda on top of the hill," said the British tankers themselves.

And the weapons? It can bring tears of pity. The fact is that from 1938 to 1942, the main armament of British tanks was a 2-pounder rapid-fire gun of several modifications. And this at a time when all other countries switched to 75-mm guns! Moreover, the British had only armor-piercing shells for this very 40-mm cannon! Yes, the British tankers were going to fight only with enemy tanks, starting knightly duels, as in the good old days, and in such cases, the gun, which had good armor-piercing, was relatively useful. But what about infantry tanks?! They had exactly the same! No one noticed a deep contradiction in the concept itself. Infantry escort tanks must destroy the surviving nodes of the enemy defense line. And what do you order, to shoot at the bunker with a small-caliber blank? No, strictly speaking, high-explosive shells still existed. However, they had negligible explosive power, and the British tankers simply did not take them. Not without reason, when English tanks began to come to us under Lend-Lease, the question arose of producing our own 40-mm high-explosive shells.

Nothing has changed and the appearance of a 6-pounder gun (57-mm). That is why the British for a long time considered the American Grant to be their best tank, which in fact was a lousy car. But the witch had a 75 mm cannon!

But let's be fair. German tanks were even worse, but this did not stop the Germans from fighting. But the organization of tank units tightly blocked the British way to blitzkrieg. As we shall see later, they failed to master this complex science until the very end of the war. Like us

in and

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Dim, the number of applicants for possession of the mega-weapon "VIEKtez" is rapidly declining.

On the eve of the war, British tanks were consolidated into regiments and brigades; divisions appeared much later. Their organization left much to be desired. Even after several years of war, the British stubbornly clung to the concept of purely tank formations. The German Panzer Divisions had only one Panzer Regiment. The rest is motorized infantry, artillery, reconnaissance, communications, and so on. The British have tanks, tanks, and only tanks, somewhat diluted with artillery. Infantry and cruiser tanks did not coexist within the same regiment, so we call regiments equipped with cruiser tanks armored (Attoigea), and regiments equipped with infantry tanks were officially called army tank regiments (Attu apK). The very structure of the British tank brigades completely cut off for them the possibility of using blitzkrieg tactics.

Moreover, the very idea of massing tank forces seemed to be disgusting to the British, because the British army had only a couple of tank divisions. Tank corps were not formed, and these divisions were part of ordinary army corps, mixed with infantry. The British did not even think about creating tank armies. In general, a characteristic feature of the actions of the British troops in this war was a leisurely methodicalness, which by its very nature denies blitzkrieg. A glow discharge, of course, is also an electrical phenomenon, but it is completely different from a lightning strike.

So, the lightning-fast campaign in Western Europe was left behind, and the main forces of the Wehrmacht headed to the East, where a much more formidable enemy awaited them. True, the Germans did not consider him as such. On the contrary, there was a saying about a colossus with feet of clay, and the Wehrmacht was going to fight with him with one left. That is why, based on the results of the French campaign, if any conclusions were drawn, then almost no measures were taken.

By the beginning of June 1941, the Wehrmacht had: 877 - T-G 1974 - T-P, 350 - T-Sh with a 37-mm gun, 1090 - T-Sh with a 50-mm gun, 517 - T-TU, 170 - 35 (0, 754 - 38 (and 330 command tanks. That is, a significant percentage of "tanks" of zero combat value has been preserved. And, naturally, the number of tanks in combat units was less. So certain changes are still noticeable. The T-Sh tanks began to be re-equipped with a 50 mm cannon, but even here there were adventures. Hitler demanded a 60 caliber cannon, but the industry decided to confine itself to a much less powerful 42 caliber cannon. Yes, such a palliative decision was based. This gun could be installed in an old turret without modifications, while the 60-caliber one required a redesign. But the main reason, most likely, was all the same conclusions. As long as everything is fine, why bother?

Much greater changes were made in the organizational structure of the Panzerwaffe. The structure of the tank regiment was changed, new tank divisions were formed. If at first one, and then two tank groups operated in France, now four tank groups were preparing for the offensive. Alas, from this increase in the number of formations, the number of tanks in them did not at all quadruple. And the prospects for a new campaign, if the Germans had known the true number of Soviet tanks, would have looked quite gloomy. But Guderian predicted in his book that the Russians would have about 10,000 tanks, but even he could not imagine the true number of Soviet tank troops. By the way, the Germans did not even come close to this figure during the entire war, and we exceeded it many times.

The number of tanks in the German army varies according to sources, but the spread, as a rule, does not exceed 20-30 tanks of each type. And what did the Red Army oppose to them? This is where the discrepancy in numbers turns out to be absolutely fantastic - from 18 to 26 thousand tanks. Again, there were noticeably fewer tanks in the active army, and even fewer in the western military districts. But

any calculation options give a three- to four-fold superiority of the Red Army over the Wehrmacht.

Let us take some average values given by M.B. Baryatinsky. On June 22, 1941, the USSR had 23,140 tanks, Germany - 5,694. Mechanized corps with 10,394 tanks were stationed in the western districts, Germany and its allies deployed only 3,899 tanks. By the way, all the authors unanimously mention the tanks assigned to the Soviet infantry divisions...

In addition, there is a general belief that comparing the quality of German and Soviet tanks is simply ridiculous. Indeed, looking at M-Gi KV, placed side by side, one can only laugh merrily. But this makes the events of the summer of 1939 even more inexplicable.

Let's be fair: our army was armed with not only T-34 and KV, but also T-26, BT, multi-turreted tanks and light ones. And if we ridicule, we justly ridicule! - the unfortunate wedge T-[, then how should we evaluate the T-37 and T-38? Also laugh by putting them next to T-GU? The same Suvorov-Rezun is trying to give some meaning to the existence of these machines, arguing that the Germans did not have floating scouts at all. I agree, it wasn't. However, they were not in the Red Army either. Sorry, but what kind of scout from a tankette that does not have a walkie-talkie? If she discovers something, how will she report it?

However, the relationship between Soviet and German tanks was much more complicated than it might seem at first glance. We are accustomed to victorious reports and fanfare, and any doubt about the complete and absolute qualitative superiority of Soviet tanks over German ones is perceived as an attempt on the shrine.

All authors correctly say that no upgrades could make a medium tank out of a light T-Sh tank. It was possible to attach additional armor, install a new gun (by the way, it was not possible to install a normal tank gun of the period of the Second World War, that is, 75 mm), but all this led to an increase in weight and, accordingly,

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performance deterioration. However, the same authors, without hesitation, argue that attaching additional armor and replacing the gun makes the T-26 a worthy adversary T Sh. And what, the characteristics of this tank do not worsen from increasing weight? After all, it has a much smaller reserve for modernization than T-Sh. After all, the Vickers 6-ton, or T-26, is a tank of a different generation than the T-Sh, and therefore cannot compete with it in any way. However, just like the T-Sh is a tank of a different generation in relation to the KT-34, and cannot compete with it in any way. At least on paper.

But here completely different factors come into play, which show how risky it is to compare paper, reference characteristics with real combat characteristics, even for a single tank. We quoted above the German memorandum, in which the Soviet 45-mm armor-piercing shells received a completely unsatisfactory assessment. But this is not the propaganda of Dr. Goebbels, this is a serious document, on the basis of which the Germans determined the development paths of the Panzerwaffe.

But here are the results of the shooting of the T-Sh tank at the NIBT training ground:

"The specified German cemented armor 32 mm thick is equal in strength to 42–44 mm homogeneous armor of the IZ type. Thus, cases of shelling the side of the tank at an angle greater than 30 degrees lead to a ricochet of the projectile ...

In this case, the matter was aggravated by the fact that shells of the 1938 release were used during firing. With poor-quality heat treatment of the hull, which was carried out according to a reduced program in order to increase the yield...

The investigation convincingly shows that, despite the said decision to seize, a large number of 45-mm Ornament-piercing shells of the above-mentioned part have the same marks and, apparently, the same defect.

But even when using new shells, "free from the specified defect", only 2 of the 5 shells pierced the armor. But with our armor, the situation was completely different. If we turn to the test results of the T-34 tank at Aberdeen

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test site in the USA, we can read: "Chemical analysis of the armor showed that the armor plates have a shallow surface hardening, while the bulk of the armor plate is mild steel." The running gear of the tank, suspension and transmission, also caused a lot of criticism. But back to armored matters. Let's take the NII-48 report, prepared in April 1942, which provides statistics on the destruction of Soviet tanks by armor-piercing shells. And we will see that small German shells with a caliber of 37 and 50 mm quite regularly penetrated the armor of Soviet tanks, although almost all hits fell on the sides and rear of the hull and turrets. In addition, based on the results of testing captured anti-tank guns and shells, a gloomy conclusion was drawn: our industry will not be able to master ammunition of this quality.

And as the grossest mistake of Soviet designers, we can mention the "terrible" KV-2, which many historians cite as an example to the West. They say they didn't create anything like that. Of course, they didn't create it, because they didn't even intend to create it. Sticking a 152mm howitzer into a tank turret is a nightmare. With a roll of about 5 degrees, this bulky structure was already jammed tightly. Was it possible to fight on such a "tank"? Only in 1943

2009, what the KV-2 was supposed to become from the first day appeared - the SU-152 self-propelled gun, which earned the nickname "St. and other German menageries.

And yet, the numerical superiority of the Soviet tank forces over the Panzerwaffe was very great. However, there was another serious factor that worked against us - this is the organizational structure of the mechanized corps of the Red Army. Recall that the Germans in the tank group had an average of about 850 tanks, divided between two or three corps, consisting, as a rule, of two divisions. In addition to tanks, respectively, there were corps and army support and maintenance units, artillery, sapper and others, and others, and others ... And what do we have? Av red army creating

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There were monsters like the 7th mechanized corps - 959 tanks, the 6th mechanized corps - 1131 tanks. And this was not something extraordinary, because according to the state, approved in February 1941, our mechanized corps was supposed to have [103] a tank, that is, more than a German tank group, in the sense of an army. But at the same time minus all command structures, minus auxiliary troops and services. Even if the number of artillery, sappers and anti-aircraft guns in the Soviet mechanized corps was not inferior to the German tank group, they were assigned to their divisions, which made it extremely difficult to maneuver forces, their concentration and transfer to other sectors of the front. And the German commander could freely use units of army subordination without violating the structure of divisions and without breaking the plans of subordinate commanders. Here we can recall an example from the not too distant past - the Mukden battle of the Russo-Japanese War. The commander of the Russian army, General Kuropatkin, disheveled all the corps and divisions subordinate to him, literally by battalions, and with his own hands created an atmosphere of such chaos and confusion that it was just right for the Japanese to reward him for this. Our gigantic mechanized corps in the summer of 1941 found themselves in approximately the same position. By the way, when later tank armies began to form in the Red Army, they had no more than 700-800 tanks. Apparently, this is the empirically found limit of the controllability of tank units.

But there is also a second component of the blitzkrieg - battlefield aviation. Here one cannot bet on "aviation in general," as the Western allies first tried to do. Medium and heavy bombers can do little to help the advance of tank units. The allies tried to do this once, and it all ended in a scandal. We are talking, of course, about attempts to take the city of Caen in Normandy. Not only did the British commander's "genius" Montgomery once again show his utter failure in this operation, but the Allied Formidable Aviation was also disgraced. No, she completed her task, the heads of the Germans fell

how many thousand

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tons of bombs. But in addition to the quite expected results, quite unexpected ones suddenly appeared. The Allied bombers dug up the planned area of the offensive so well that even the tanks could not overcome this obstacle course. Once again, the old truth has been confirmed: too good is also not good.

And with this component of the blitzkrieg, things turned out to be very unimportant for almost all countries participating in the Second World War. It is today that combat helicopters, fire support helicopters and similar aircraft are flashing everywhere and everywhere. But in those days it was much more difficult with such constructions. Actually, only a dive bomber met the requirements for a battlefield aircraft. All the various attack aircraft and fighter-bombers met these requirements, at best, partially. Or they didn't match at all.

One could proudly declare, like the British, that they were not interested in dive-bombers in principle, even after they presented Rommel's marshal's baton on a silver platter, breaking

resistance of the Tobruk garrison. One could say that strong anti-aircraft artillery made dive attacks too risky, but the German pilots did not seem to be aware of this, destroying one anti-aircraft battery after another.

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In general, by the beginning of World War II, only the Germans had created an aircraft capable of supporting the offensive of tanks, and, more importantly, created a system of interaction between aviation and ground forces. Of course, at first things did not go as smoothly as we would like, but already during the offensive in France in the spring of 1940, this system showed itself in full splendor.

An insignificant number of English and French dive-bombers available at the beginning of the war were destroyed so rapidly that the question of their interaction with the troops did not even have time to arise. And only in 1944, the Allies in the European theaters acquired aircraft capable of acting as attack aircraft. These were

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American Thunderbolt fighters and British Typhoons. Armed with missiles, these aircraft showed themselves well in the fight against trains and mechanized columns in the rear. However, their actions on the front line were far from being so successful, and they almost did not provide assistance to the troops.

The most curious thing is that the system of air support for the troops of the Allies, more precisely, the Americans, still existed. And it was also brought to perfection, but applied to specific tasks that had nothing to do with the offensive of tank units and blitzkrieg. We are talking about landing operations in the Pacific theater in 1943-1945. During the landings of the marines on the next atoll, several units of Hellcat or Corsair fighters armed with missiles were constantly on duty in the air. The landing force included guidance groups, on whose instructions these aircraft attacked Japanese firing points. Agree, this was an order of magnitude simpler task than supporting the offensive of a tank regiment. In addition, the Americans themselves limited their capabilities by arming these aircraft only with missiles. Yes, fighters could carry bombs and used them against Japanese ships, as well as during preliminary bombardments. But, apparently, the accuracy of bombing was insufficient to destroy point targets, so missiles were used that had an incomparably different efficiency. By the way, it was the Americans who used a curious tactical novelty. They freed the commander of the strike air group from having to attack the target himself. The commander was only concerned with coordinating his actions. aircraft and target designation. Even the Germans did not reach this point.

It remains to consider how things were with the air component of the blitzkrieg in the Red Army. Formally, our aviation had everything it needed. We have created dive bombers. We have created stormtroopers. We even got a guidance system for aviation, however, the first mention of it dates back to 1943, but it still appeared.

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By the beginning of the war, an improvised conversion of the Pe-2, called a dive bomber, began to enter service with the Red Army. However, this aircraft was not actually such. You never know what he dived. The British carried out crazy diving experiments on heavy Wellingtons. In addition, the Pe-2 bomb load was, to put it mildly, small. Again, this is not the place to analyze in detail the advantages and disadvantages of this aircraft, we simply refer the curious to the detailed monograph "The Pawn That Became a Queen." We will simply confine ourselves to the remark that I could not find any mention of the use of the Pe-2 to destroy targets on the battlefield upon requests from the ground. By the way, I have no doubt that such episodes certainly exist. However, the very fact that they have to be looked for on purpose speaks volumes.

Toward the end of the war, a real Tu-2 dive bomber appeared, surpassing the corresponding German aircraft in all characteristics. However, for some mysterious

reasons, and he did not take root as a battlefield aircraft. Maybe it was because he was too big? After all, the Germans used the 1-88 for completely different purposes, although this aircraft could well dive. ,

In the bottom line, we have the Il-2 attack aircraft. By the way, the rest is good - the most massive aircraft of the Second World War. war. But after all, with such a number of attack aircraft, we would have the right to expect much more tangible results. Of course, the main reason for this is the interaction between tanks and aviation that was not established until the very end of the war. Formal steps in this direction have been taken. But only among the Germans, the guidance of strike aircraft was carried out by a lieutenant or a captain, who followed in a special vehicle with advanced units. What do we have? Let's take a typical example - the events on the Kursk salient. "The plan of the operation provided for the deportation of the operational groups of the Air Force with their own means of communication to the headquarters of the armies." Stop! Pay attention?! Not to the headquarters of the corps, and even more so not to the headquarters of a division or regiment - to the headquarters of the army. However, this was not carried out either. In the end, the 1st and 5th guards tan

The Soviet armies received "representatives of the Air Force" - the deputy commander and deputy chief of staff of the 2nd Air Army. What could they do, sitting, again, in the headquarters? As a result, while the application was going through all the instances, the situation at the front changed in the most radical way and the attack aircraft struck at an empty place or, much worse, at their own troops. After that, all that remained was to loudly report on the monstrous successes of anti-tank bombs, which cut out the entire Das Reich division to the root. And the fact that our aviation defeated the station Prokhorovka, where the unloading point of the 6th Guards Army was located, was modestly kept quiet.

Summary. Summing up, the picture emerges as follows. Of all the components: a reliable, strong tank; proper organization of tank units; well-established interaction of various types of troops; battlefield aircraft; well-established interaction between troops and aviation - not a single army possessed a complete set. Theoretically, blitzkrieg was impossible at all! However, we see examples of successful lightning operations with our own eyes. The Germans and we came closest to the ideal. But this is precisely what shows how much more the right organization and combat training mean than the mere number of tanks, guns, and aircraft.

Chapter 3 THE FIRST PANCAKE HALVIN GOL

We have already said that the Spanish Civil War did not contribute much to the development of the theory of tank warfare. There were few tanks there, they were used sporadically and did not have a serious impact on the course of hostilities. However, one conclusion was drawn, if not by all the participants in the conflict, then by the main participants for sure. We are talking about the Soviet Union and Germany. However, as we have seen, even here not everything went smoothly, so it should not be surprising that the Italians did not draw any conclusions at all.

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The tactical doctrines of the use of tanks have been tested many thousands of kilometers from future European battlefields, in the Mongolian deserts scorched by the sun. Of course, we are talking about the battles on the Khalkhin Gol River.

In general, this episode is an excellent illustration of the words of the eternally drunk fitter Mechnikov: "Consent is the product of the complete non-resistance of the parties." Or more precisely: if you want, any trifle can turn into a reason for war, or, to put it in a scholarly way, saziu fe!!.

In the 30s of the last century, a number of border conflicts took place between the Soviet Union and Japan, as well as their puppets. This was a direct consequence of the inaccurate demarcation of the border (Khasan) or the complete absence of such (Khalkhin-Gol). By the way, subsequent conflicts with China had the same reasons, for example, Damansky Island. By the way, today this island is no longer an island at all, but a peninsula on the Chinese bank of the river. And what should the state border of Russia look like in this case? Khalkhin Gol was generally border

a dispute between two unrecognized states — Outer and Inner Mongolia, Manchukuo and the Mongolian People's Republic. True, the puppet Mongolian People's Republic at that time had a serious advantage over Manchukuo. Manchukuo was recognized only by Japan, but the MPR was recognized by two states, although, apart from the USSR, it was an even more puppet Republic of Tuva.

Soviet historians were fond of repeating that "several reasons pushed the ruling circles of the Land of the Rising Sun to unleash a larger-scale conflict." But no, even the most violent fantasy can suggest how exactly a skirmish in the Mongolian sands will force the USSR to refuse to provide military assistance to China. We will not delve into political intricacies, we will simply say that it was these very barren and useless sands that saw the first example of the massive use of tanks. Of course, during the First World War, the British used tanks in fairly large

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quantities, but the massive use of tanks does not mean massive. The British lined up tanks in the longest line, which makes one recall the grenadiers of Frederick the Great. It remains only to recall that the lines of the Prussian army, drawn as if on a ruler, crumbled to dust when they collided with the French columns. And so, on the orders of Commander Zhukov, columns of Soviet tanks went on the attack. How the first attempt to implement the ideas of either a blitzkrieg or a deep operation ended, we will see.

The spring began to twist back in 1934. Constant violations of the border, and in both directions, led to clashes, skirmishes, and small-scale battles. But in May 1939, the spring was twisted, and it burst. At the same time, at first, the Soviet command acted faster and more efficiently than the Japanese. On March 3, the commander of the 57th separate corps, divisional commander Feklenko, ordered the task force of the 11th tank brigade to be sent to the conflict area. And only in April, the commander of the Kwantung Army, General Ueda, signed Order No. 1488 "Principles for resolving border conflicts between Manchukuo and the USSR." Note that no Mongolia is mentioned in this order.

And then something began that is simply impossible to call otherwise than a chain of riddles. Let's start with the very first one, which catches the eye, but still has no answer. Why Khalkhin Gol? Why??!! Look at the map, do not regret half a minute. And then you will be surprised. Why did the Japanese command like this godforsaken corner, which you can't even call bearish, because not a single bear can survive there?! The funny thing is that even if the Japanese succeeded in their adventure, it would not bring them absolutely no dividends. It is possible to cut off a deserted and worthless corner of Mongolia - the so-called Tamtsak-Bulak ledge - but what to do with it next? The road to Ulaanbaatar (or how it is then? Kyakhta? Urga?) He does not open. The road to Chita and Blagoveshchensk - even more so. So what did the Japanese and the Mongols forget in equal measure?!

The second riddle, which, quite possibly, still has

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There is a solution, but I personally do not know it. If you look at the modern American topographic map of MG. 50-03, you can see an amazing thing. All battles in the Khalkhin Gol region took place on the territory of modern China, that is, the then Manchuria. So who is the aggressor here? And in general, the border line today has a completely different shape than on the Soviet / Russian maps depicting this event. However, as I have already warned, there may be a very simple explanation. Later, the two fraternal countries amicably settled all border disputes. Although, given the habits of Mao #e-Bopg'a, this seems to me more than doubtful. But still admissible.

But with all this, the riddles of Khalkhin Gol are just beginning. Clashes began in May 1939. Who exactly was the initiator, it is difficult to say. Most likely, the natives kept cute

to the heart of the habits of the cattle thieves of the era of Genghis Khan, who himself sinned with this at first. And then one offended one turned to his brother, who was either a cyric or a bargut, and an irregular, but quite official armed force appeared. And off we go...

In short, in May, serious clashes involving heavy weapons began, although so far they have not yet gone beyond the usual border conflict. However, both sides gradually built up forces in the conflict area, because such events have the property of self-escalation. Air battles began, which at first ended in favor of the Japanese. This caused a nervous reaction from the Soviet leadership, which first transferred to the battle area a group of the best pilots who had experience in fighting in China and Spain, and then resorted to a tried and tested method - they changed the commander. Komdiv N.V. Feklenko was removed, and G.K. was appointed in his place. Zhukov. Oddly enough, this episode had practically no effect on the further service of Feklenko, who gradually rose to the rank of lieutenant general of tank troops. Another mystery... However, he did not play a significant role during the Great Patriotic War and occupied only the rear and staff

positions.

In June, both sides built up forces in the conflict area and developed plans for further actions, and both Zhukov and General Komatsubara, who commanded the Japanese troops, intended to attack. Komatsubara had at his disposal the 23rd Infantry Division and some other units, including two tank regiments, a total of about 22,000 soldiers, 120 guns and 80 tanks. Initially, he intended to transfer not only his infantry, but also tanks over the western bank of the Khalkhin Gol River. However, the Japanese sappers did not cope with the task, and the tanks could not move along the bridges they built, so he had to leave the tanks for operations on the eastern bank of the river. On June 27, Komatsubara decides to cross the river with part of the forces of the 23rd division in order to reach the rear of the Soviet-Mongolian troops stationed on the eastern bank of the river. At the same time, one regiment of the 23rd division, together with tanks, pins down Soviet troops. The purpose of the operation is to encircle and destroy the Soviet units on the eastern bank of Khalkhin Gol, numbering about 5,000 people. The Soviet command formed the 1st army group, which had a noticeable advantage in heavy artillery, of which the Japanese were very quickly convinced.

Of particular interest is one phrase from Komatsubara's order: "The division with its main forces is forcing the Khalkhin-Gol River in order to capture and destroy the enemy who has crossed the border." However, our historians claim that the place of future battles, Mount Bayan-Tsagan, is located 40 kilometers from the border.

The offensive of the pinning group developed slowly, because the tanks got stuck in marshy soil. On June 30, the first clashes took place, after which the Japanese received the first more or less reliable information about the composition of the Soviet forces, in particular about the arrival of the 11th tank brigade. However, Komatsubara did not dare to cancel the operation and scheduled the offensive for July 3rd. But the commander of the pinning group, General Yasuoka, decided to strike on the NIGHT of SO 2 on July 3rd. It would be simply ridiculous to talk about some kind of blitzkrieg applied to Japanese tanks,

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moreover, the Japanese, until the very end of World War II, did not manage to establish interaction between different types of troops. The night attack of Yasuoka's tanks ended in almost nothing. Its only result was disputes over losses. The Japanese admitted the loss of one tank, the Soviet reports say about the destruction of ten. A.V. went the furthest. Shishov, who reported that as a result of the fighting on the eastern bank of the river in the area of Mount Bain Tsagan, 30 Japanese tanks were destroyed. He is not even embarrassed that the mountain is located on the western shore.

As our historians write, "the command of the 1st Army Group during June was unable to establish sufficient reconnaissance." To write bluntly that Zhukov had not been able to establish reconnaissance for a whole month, apparently, was scary. The divisional commander decided to strike the Yasuoka group himself, at the same time

ordering the 11th tank and 6th armored brigades to advance to the river. Zhukov did not suspect about the crossing of the Japanese division to the western coast of Khalkhin Gol.

° Early on the morning of July 3, units of the Japanese 23rd Infantry Division began to cross the river and moved in the direction of Mount Bain-Tsagan. The Mongol cavalry, who were covering this section of the coast, withdrew without putting up any resistance. And then riddles are poured out as if from a leaky bag.

Every single Soviet source writes: the Japanese crossed the river, climbed the steep slopes of Bain-Tsagan, dug in and fortified themselves. But was it so? At the first glance, this hypothesis crumbles to dust. All our sources report that the Japanese occupied the mountain at about 8 o'clock in the morning. However, the first encounter between the 6th armored brigade and the Japanese takes place as early as 7:00 am south of Bain-Tsagan. What forces of the Japanese crossed the river, no one knew. Only this can explain the order to the 2nd battalion of the 11th tank brigade to destroy the Japanese detachment. According to the maps, the battalion's clash with the Japanese 71st Infantry Regiment takes place 8 kilometers from the Japanese crossings and 3

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Fights on July 4-5 in the Bain-Tsagan area

meters from Bain-Tsagan. Another mystery: did the Japanese fortify themselves on the mountain, or did they immediately move further south in fulfillment of the Komatsubara plan? The result of the oncoming battle between the infantry regiment and the tank battalion was sad for both. The Japanese offensive was stopped, but the battalion lost 14 tanks.

Only now did Zhukov realize that the Japanese had transferred large forces to the western shore of Khalkhin Gol, and decided to immediately attack the enemy, as he clearly intended to go to the crossings of the detachment fighting on the eastern shore. He decided to destroy the Japanese with a simultaneous concentric strike from three directions. Since the Red Army, by accident or intentionally, had large tank forces in the battle area, imagine Zhukov

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there was an opportunity for the first in history to conduct a classic blitzkrieg operation. Based on the experience of fighting in Spain, as we remember, certain conclusions were drawn, and now it only remained to demonstrate in practice the solidity of these conclusions. Alas, divisional commander Zhukov missed the opportunity to get ahead of Guderian on the tablets of the blitzkrieg. The operation was organized so ugly that one can only wonder how it brought at least some success. However,

The descriptions of the battles of July 3 and 4 are so vague and inaccurate that it is not possible even to reconstruct the events.

The word "Memories and reflections":

"The enemy managed to concentrate more than ten thousand bayonets on Mount Bain-Tsagan; Soviet troops were able to concentrate more than a thousand bayonets; The Japanese troops had about 100 guns and up to 60 anti-tank guns. We have a little over 50 guns, including those supporting from the eastern bank of the Khalkhin-Gol River.

However, the 11th heroic tank brigade, which had up to 150 tanks, the 7th motorized armored brigade, which had 154 armored vehicles, and the 8th Mongolian armored division, armed with 45-mm cannons, fought in our ranks."

Lie number one immediately catches your eye. In an unfortunate three or four hours, the Japanese managed to transport not only three infantry regiments, but also one and a half hundred guns across Khalkhin Gol through a single pontoon bridge?! It was possible to support the attack of tanks by the infantry of the 24th motorized rifle regiment and to transfer part of the artillery from the south. The result is the same as always.

The attack was carried out by scattered forces. The 1st battalion of the 1st tank brigade was the first to attack at 11.30. Neither infantry nor artillery supported him, as a result, the battalion lost half of its tanks and withdrew by 1600 without achieving anything. The 3rd battalion attacked next, which also suffered losses and was forced to withdraw. True, the Japanese were impressed by these attacks, and they were sure that at least 1000 tanks would attack them. The 24th Motorized Rifle Regiment lost its way and arrived at the battlefield only

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cook 13.00. To justify himself, the regiment commander I.I. Fedyuninsky is trying to blame everything on Zhukov. Say, it was he who made a non-standard decision to attack with tanks alone without infantry support. He also tells a charming tale about 17 anti-tank batteries, 10 artillery and howitzer batteries, which the Japanese have already managed to deploy on Mount Bain-Tsagan. . |

I suggest to anyone who wants to make the simplest experiment - pick up a shovel, go out into the yard and try to dig at least a shooting cell of a full profile. We are no longer talking about a company trench or a gun trench there. How long will it take? Maybe, after this experiment, he will also doubt the defense in depth, which the Japanese had just in the blink of an eye. By the way, let's not forget that literally in all the memoirs of the participants in the battles, the exceptional steepness of the mountain, which interfered with our infantry, is emphasized. But the Japanese guns, apparently, just fluttered to its very top.

Further more. Around 1500, the 247th armored battalion of the 7th motorized armored brigade tried to carry out its own attack. This attack was also repulsed by the Japanese with losses for us. And only around 19.00 was it possible to carry out a kind of coordinated attack by infantry and tanks. It was also repulsed, although this time our troops did not suffer any particular losses. So, instead of one powerful blow that could overturn the Japanese, our troops carried out five scattered uncoordinated attacks, during which the 11th tank brigade lost 77 tanks out of 133 and 37 armored cars out of 59 that participated in the battle. Another mystery - what kind of weapons were used to destroy all these tanks? A careful reading of Soviet memoirs reveals that the main weapons of the Japanese infantry were bottles of gasoline, and nothing more. Of course, the Japanese, of course, managed to transport several anti-tank guns through Khalkhin Gol, and they certainly took part in the battle. But there were too few of them, and, most importantly,

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these guns were obviously installed openly, at best, in the terrain.

And yet these attacks brought the desired result. On the evening of July 3, General Komatsubara ordered the strike group to be withdrawn back across the river. The retreat began on July 4 at 10 am, and the Soviet tank units, which had suffered heavy losses the day before, could not prevent this. The 24th motorized rifle regiment tried to crush the Japanese 26th regiment, but failed. As a result, by July 5, the Japanese grouping returned to the eastern bank of the river.

And again the memories of Marshal Zhukov. However, Fedyuninsky's memoirs reproduce this passage with an accuracy almost to a comma:

"The battle continued day and night on July 4th. Only by 3 o'clock in the morning on July 5, the enemy's resistance was finally broken, and the Japanese troops began to hastily retreat to the crossing. But the crossing was blown up by their own sappers, who feared a breakthrough of our tanks. Japanese officers in full gear threw themselves directly into the water and immediately drowned literally in front of our tankers.

The remnants of the Japanese troops that captured the Bain-Tsagan mountain were completely destroyed on the eastern slopes of the mountain in the area of the fall of the Khalkhin-Gol River. Thousands of corpses, a mass of dead horses, a multitude of crushed and broken guns, mortars, machine guns and vehicles littered Mount Bain Tsagan. During these days, 45 Japanese aircraft were shot down in air battles, including 20 dive bombers.

By the way, the Japanese did not have dive bombers near Khalkhin Gol. The Japanese sincerely wondered why the Soviet troops did not try to destroy the crossing, with aircraft or artillery - it does not matter. After all, then the shock group would indeed be doomed. But our generals only managed to come up with a fable about the premature explosion of the bridge, after which many samurai drowned in the river. Indirect evidence of the not very successful actions of our troops on Bain Tsagan can be the lack of photographic documents. Surely the shooting was carried out, but, apparently, it was not the right thing to shoot. All published photos belong to

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fighting already on the eastern coast of Khalkhin Gol, either during the period of repelling Japanese attacks, or after the successful offensive of the Soviet troops in August 1939.

The only consolation is that the Japanese tank units were even less successful. They tried to attack the 149th motorized rifle regiment and the 9th motorized armored brigade, located on the eastern bank of Khalkhin Gol, but achieved nothing at all, losing 41 tanks out of 73 that participated in the battle on July 3. In general, Zhukov's intention to deliver a powerful tank strike failed miserably. The attack ended in heavy losses, but, somewhat unexpectedly, brought results. The Japanese could not stand the tension of the battle and retreated across the river. In fact, these battles could have fatal consequences for the future. Our commanders could well be sure that they had managed to drive out the Japanese with these scattered attacks of weak forces, that it was not at all necessary to waste time on concentrating a striking fist, on organizing artillery support. But the worst thing is that they could decide that they can take any losses - they will still pay off. "More than 10 thousand enemy soldiers and officers perished on the mountain slopes. The remnants of the Japanese troops fled in disarray to the opposite bank of the river. They lost almost all of their tanks and artillery." By signing such reports, it is not difficult to believe in one's own infallibility, and the name that has become attached to this episode - "The Battle of Bain-Tsagan" - sounds rather ambiguous. Much more attention deserves the August offensive of the Soviet troops, which ended with the encirclement and destruction of the main forces of the Japanese 23rd division. It was a carefully planned and well executed operation. True, tanks did not play such a prominent role in it as in the events of July 3-5, the main blow was delivered by infantry divisions. However, the tank brigades fulfilled their task, in a number of cases preventing the cut-off Japanese troops from leaving the encirclement of the NIA.

During the fighting, the Red Army lost about 8,000 people killed and 15,000 wounded. In this regard, it is necessary

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to mention another mystery of Khalkhin Gol - the number of Japanese losses. We have somehow established the opinion that the Japanese were utterly defeated, losing more than 60,000 people killed and wounded. No one wanted to wonder where these figures came from, because only one reinforced division and several separate regiments participated in the battles on the Japanese side. Let us refer to an interested and biased witness, K.E. Voroshilov, who reported to Stalin: "As expected, there were no divisions in the encirclement, the enemy either managed to withdraw the main forces, or, more precisely, there were no large forces in this area for a long time, and a specially trained garrison was sitting, - which has now been destroyed. |

On the other hand, the data of the Japanese side are no less doubtful. 8440 killed and 8766 wounded is more than a strange ratio. Usually; the number of wounded is three times the number of those killed, and here we see a ratio of one to one. The history of wars knows no such examples, and this riddle still remains unresolved.

Summary. During the battles for Mount Bain-Tsagan, the command of the Red Army had the opportunity to carry out a classic blitzkrieg operation - a joint strike of tanks and motorized infantry with the aim of encircling and subsequently destroying the enemy. Instead, the battle turned into a series of uncoordinated frontal attacks, during which our tanks suffered unnecessarily heavy losses, although as a result they forced the Japanese troops to retreat.

Chapter 4

If before the war the word "blitzkrieg" was known only to the German military, and even then not to everyone, then with the outbreak of World War II, literally the whole world learned about it. Who tried here? Well, don't ask stupid questions, of course, American journalists. At the same time, they managed

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inflate the myth of the blitzkrieg to absolutely fantastic proportions, despite the fact that the German army itself was still only mastering this tactic, and the entire Polish campaign was only a harbinger of the future successes of the Panzerwaffe. If we allow ourselves a colorful comparison, then so far we could only talk about distant lightning on the horizon. While muffled thunder peals come, but not a single lightning has yet struck.

If we dispassionately analyze the actions of the German army during the Polish campaign, it turns out that only one of the battles corresponds to the postulates of the blitzkrieg. We are talking, of course, about the Battle of Bzura, where two Polish armies were surrounded and destroyed. It's another matter that the stonework itself turned out to be fleeting, and one could speak of a blitzkrieg.

However, it didn't start out great. It turned out that the defeat in the First World War and the interwar years did not go unnoticed even for the German military machine, which was considered an exemplary one. It has become far from exemplary and not quite a machine, having lost coherence and without trouble. execution.

Failures and problems began even before the start of the war. They say that the plan of any military operation exists only before the first shot, but read what was going on in the German headquarters [Near the army corps on the eve of the Polish campaign, that is, long before the first shot. The orderly German order has dispersed like dust in the wind, and before us appears something most reminiscent of a madhouse.

So, the Wehrmacht is preparing for the invasion of Polca, the Weiss operational plan has been worked out in detail. It remains to run the famous German war machine. [The corps consists of three infantry divisions: 4th, 14th and 24th. Pay attention to the completely non-random selection

numbers. The vaunted German Og4pie in full splendor. Corps Commander von Schwedler and Chief of Staff Model solve difficult problems. The OKH avoided declaring mobilization so as not to alert the Poles. When August 28 was

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an alarm was announced (for diplomatic reasons, this date was postponed several times), the headquarters of the GU Corps received only 3 days to solve a number of urgent tasks. Each of the 3 regular divisions of the corps was to be transferred to the area of concentration outside the military district. And then, quite unexpectedly, on August 29, Model discovers that the 24th Infantry Division has been transferred to the 8th Army. Moreover, even before the start of the redeployment of divisions, every third battalion and every third company lost their commanders, as well as at least 20% of experienced non-commissioned officers and soldiers. They were withdrawn to form the backbone of the emerging 56th and 87th Infantry Divisions, which were deployed on 4 September on the French border. The transfer of divisions to new places required not only the accurate work of the headquarters, but also led to the formation of gaps in the ranks of the remaining units, which had to be filled by reservists. Given the speed with which the German troops advanced to the border, it was clearly not possible to complete the resupply

The loss of the 24th division meant that in this war, from the very beginning, the corps would be regarded as tactical headquarters, which should lead the divisions transferred to a specific operation. That is, the disorder was laid in the very structure of the German army, which is fundamentally different from the period of the First World War. If the commander and chief of staff still had any doubts about this, they were dispersed on August 30, when the 14th Infantry Division was withdrawn from the corps and replaced by the 46th Infantry Division from the XIII military district. On the same day, the 10th Army transferred several separate units and subunits to the corps, including sappers, builders, motorized pontoon teams, army artillery battalions, guard troops, anti-aircraft batteries and a Luftwaffe reconnaissance group. [The corps accepted these units without saying a word, and assigned them tasks.

But this is not the end of the restructuring and reshaping. One can easily imagine how loudly Model swore on August 31, when his old friend Friedrich Paulus (later Chief of Staff of the 10th Army) less than a day before the start of the

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call him and tell him that, in the opinion of von Reichenau, there are too many motorized formations in the [Corps] for his supporting role. As a result, a motorized engineer battalion, two pontoon columns, an anti-aircraft battalion and reconnaissance aircraft disappeared as suddenly as they appeared. Please note that they stayed under the control of the GPU Corps for less than a day. And when Model asked how the 1U Corps should transport its infantry and heavy artillery across the Warta River, having no funds to build a bridge, Paulus seriously advised him to seize the bridge from the Poles. Worse, in the late afternoon of 3] August, Paulus called Model again and said that the army headquarters had decided to take the 14th Infantry Division from him and transfer it to the XY] corps overloaded with tanks in order to strengthen the blow in the main direction. When Model protested - after all, now only 2 infantry divisions remained in the corps and no reserves to repel enemy counterattacks - Paulus calmly replied that, if necessary, it would be possible to use the reserve of Army Group South - UP Corps. The records of Lieutenant Colonel Beutler report that Model on the evening of August 31] called the headquarters of the 10th Army twice more, without being able to convince von Reichenau and Paulus to change their mind. If the polite Paulus probably answered the calls and tried to convince Model, then if von Reichenau responded, he probably simply advised the chief of staff of the corps to shut up and carry out the task with the forces that remained.

And someone else says that the German war machine worked with the precision of a clockwork. Well, if this is a watch mechanism, then it was obviously not assembled in Jena, but somewhere on the outskirts of Hong Kong. Only pleasant memories remain of the German Ogapipe...

Still, the Germans hoped to quickly defeat Poland. In fact, they had no other choice. After all, Poland was bound by defensive treaties with England and France, and if they, having entered the war, immediately began active operations on the western borders of Germany, she would have to

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would be very bad. However, the Western allies were not going to fight, the policy of appeasement was much closer to them. They even tried to convince the Polish commander, Marshal Rydz Smigly, not to carry out a general mobilization. |

According to the Weiss plan, the German Army Group North was to defeat the enemy troops located in the Polish Corridor, and then move to the Narew River, going to the rear of the Polish armies defending on the Vistula.

Army Group South operated against Polish forces in Galicia and the great bend of the Vistula. By the way, here for the first time in the German plans a phrase appears, which will then be repeated with dull persistence: "To defeat the enemy forces, not reaching the water line of the river No." In this case, in the equation, M was equal to Vistula. Then it will be the Seine, the Dnieper, the Don, and so on.

The bulk of the Wehrmacht troops, as well as almost all aircraft and tanks, were involved in Operation Weiss. The Germans proceeded from the fact that the war should be short (the concept of blitzkrieg). Within two weeks the Polish army must be completely destroyed and the country occupied. This plan was based on wide use. aviation, and above all dive bombers, which were entrusted with the task of supporting the offensive of mobile formations from the air. OKH did not use tanks to reinforce infantry divisions - almost all armored vehicles were concentrated in five corps: HLU, XU, XU, XUS and X[X. These formations were supposed to find weaknesses in the enemy's defense, overcome it on the move and enter the operational space, winning the flanks of the Polish armies. In the future, a decisive battle of encirclement and destruction was supposed, and the infantry corps were to act against the enemy's front, and the mobile units were to attack him from the rear. This concept has never been tested in practice and did not look very convincing. Even the German leadership doubted its effectiveness, as evidenced by the separation of the 10th Panzer Division from the X[X Panzer Corps into "directly

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command of the Army Group North and the creation of a separate tank division (divisional battle group) Kempf, not included in the tank corps):

But if you look impartially, the state of the Panzerwaffe met the conditions of the war with Poland (with some exaggerations), but not with any more serious enemy. The Germans had 1445 tankettes T-G in the active army and in reserve (well, I can't dare to call this creature a tank), 1223 - T-P, 202 - 35 (I), 78 - 38 (O), 98 - T-Sh , 21 —T- [Mi 215 control tanks. What from this set could fight and what not - judge for yourself.

Everyone knows that the Second World War began with volleys of the old German battleship Schleswig Holstein at the Polish fortifications of Westplatte. But how many are aware that the commander of the battleship showed "reasonable initiative" and began shelling 45 minutes before the appointed time? We will see more than once how German commanders start firing earlier than expected, violating orders and exposing their country as an aggressor. Thanks to such "initiatives", Hitler's Germany did not even have formal clues to refer to a legal declaration of war.

The offensive in the north developed without any particular complications, since here the Germans had too much superiority in forces. However, there were some surprises. When advancing on Polish positions north of Mlawa, the 7th tank regiment (Kempf division) ran into a barricade built from railway platforms. Several tanks got stuck on the barricade, after

causing the regiment to turn west. A few more tanks were destroyed by the defenders while they were trying to find a gap in the barrier. The attack failed and the Germans were forced to retreat. At 18.30, General Kempf reported to the headquarters of the 3rd Army: "The attack ended in disaster. Terrible losses. in tanks, total Not known. It's pointless to attack here."

It turned out that the regiment had lost 72 out of 184 available tanks. The Nempas themselves chose the place and time, but achieved nothing. Can we consider the failure of the first massive

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Panzerwaffe tank attack as a symbol? Don't know. But such a fact took place. —

However, this was not the case everywhere. On September 2, the Vodrig group, advancing slightly to the east, broke through the Polish positions and moved south. To capitalize on the success, the commander of the 3rd Army, General Kuchler, immediately transferred the battered Kempf division there. Blitzkrieg began to take shape, which later became familiar, even such a feature as the confusion of the command of the defending side immediately manifested itself. It simply did not have time to respond to the rapid changes in the situation. Although the Polish troops held their positions directly on Myawa, German tanks were already behind them. Therefore, the commander of the Modlin army, General Prshedzhimirsky, ordered a retreat. On the march, the Polish infantry was attacked by German aircraft and suffered heavy losses. A familiar picture, isn't it?

The fighting in the Polish corridor also did not last long. The German 4th Army immediately launched an offensive on a broad front, using superior forces. At the same time, the 3rd Panzer Division broke through the weak Polish defenses and moved on, trying to cut off the Polish divisions in the north of the corridor. As a result, the Chersk Task Force and the 9th Infantry Division were surrounded. Their resistance did not drag on, and on September 3 it was all over. The commander of the 9th division left the encirclement along with 3 officers and 20 soldiers. This picture is also painfully familiar to us. Although, if you look at the map, it becomes clear that the Germans did not have much merit in this success. The defeat of the "Help" army was predetermined by geography.

Well, as an addition to the description of the battles in the Polish Corridor, there is a little story called "A myth within a myth". Everyone knows the famous phrase of Guderian: "The Polish Pomeranian cavalry brigade, due to ignorance of the constructive data and methods of action of our tanks, attacked them with melee weapons and suffered monstrous losses." From it, a conclusion is drawn about the impenetrable stupidity of the Poles, who tried to cut Krupp's armor with sabers. Certainly

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Well, that's complete nonsense. But myths should also be refuted carefully so as not to give birth to others. Here is what the famous author A. Bushkov writes:

"On September 1, 1939, near the village of Krojanty, the 18th Lancers regiment of the Polish cavalry under the command of Colonel Mashtelazz went on the attack not on tanks, but on the 20th division of the German motorized infantry, whose advance was stopped and successfully held back for some time. Other cavalry attacks were again not against tanks, in addition, according to all the rules of war - with the support of armored vehicles and artillery. In addition, it should be remembered: the words "attack of the Polish cavalry" do not necessarily mean cavalry lava rushing in an open field. In addition to the 10th Cavalry Rifle and 24th Lancer Regiments, the famous Tenth Cavalry Brigade included units of tanks, armored vehicles, anti-tank and anti-aircraft artillery, sapper battalions and even a squadron of fire support attack aircraft, however, when describing combat operations, very often the "tenth cavalry brigade" was mentioned simply, which in itself could give rise to misunderstandings..."

But his story is also a myth. Everything was much more prosaic and ordinary. Polish cavalrymen attacked a German battalion that had settled down to rest, and indeed in mounted formation. The Germans panicked and began to scatter, while suffering significant losses. But, unfortunately for the Poles, German armored personnel carriers were stationed right there in the forest. And when the drivers

machine gunners came to their senses, they took their cars out of the forest. The execution of the Polish cavalry began, the remnants of which fled in panic. By the way, Colonel Mashtelage also died. When an Italian correspondent visited the battlefield the next day, he was told that the Polish horsemen had attacked the tanks. That, in fact, is all. By the way, this unfortunate cavalry brigade did not detain anyone.

And now let's turn to the events in the south, where almost all German tank divisions were concentrated in the 10th and 14th armies. They had to crush the Polish ar

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missions "Lodz" and "Krakow", force the Warta River, surround the Polish units, and then move to Warsaw. At first, the Germans advanced quietly, since the Polish line of defense was located at some distance from the border. But then the 4th Panzer Division lingered, trying to break the resistance of the Poles. She lost several tanks from anti-tank artillery fire. The Germans had greater success to the south, where three corps attacked the Polish army "Krakow". The 1st Panzer Division immediately wedged itself between two Polish armies, and the 7th Polish Division was attacked by three Germans at once. The Polish front immediately began to crack. Although the Volhynia Cavalry Brigade held the German 4th Panzer Division for another day, the 7th Division began a hasty retreat. At the same time, the Poles did not have time to blow up one of the important ones. bridges across the Warta, which was captured by the 1st Panzer Division. This forced the commander of the Krakow army, General Schimmel, to command a general withdrawal.

In general, the blitzkrieg was a success for the Germans. Already on September 3, the Polish army was retreating along the entire front, while part of its formations had already been defeated or even destroyed. The Poles had not yet laid down their arms, moreover, they tried to strike at the flank of the 3rd Army advancing from the north to Warsaw. However, the Germans themselves planned a detour, and the 3rd Army began to move east to reach the rear of the Polish troops in the Warsaw region. During the oncoming battles on September 5 and 6, the Polish 41st and 33rd divisions were defeated. At the same time, the German 8th Army, not without problems, but broke the resistance of the Poles at the turn of the Warta. |

And here one of the vices of the Polish system of command came into play. If we pay attention to the composition of the forces of both opponents, we will see that the Germans had 5 armies united in 2 groups, that is, a clearly constructed hierarchical ladder. But the Poles had 7 separate armies plus 2 more independent task forces. But along the way, the Poles formed some more temporary formations. And all their actions had to be controlled by a single center in the face

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Marshal Rydz-Smigly. But taking into account the collapsed communication system, all this ended in scattered and unorganized movements of divisions and brigades. As a result, all attempts at oncoming counterattacks failed, while the attacks of individual regiments and battalions were beaten off by the Germans without much difficulty.

In addition, by this time the situation on the extreme southern flank had deteriorated sharply. The German 5th Corps and the Slovak army group Benolak finally made their way through the wooded Tatra ranges and came out from the south to the ancient Polish capital Krakow. The Poles, relying on the natural strength of the defensive line, had practically no forces here, except for separate outposts. By the way, to be honest, I myself, only while working on this book, learned about the participation of Slovakia in the fascist aggression from the very first day of the Second World War.

The Poles failed to put up stubborn resistance along the entire length of the front line, and this unexpectedly brought them some benefit. The Polish divisions retreated so quickly that the Germans failed to implement the main idea of the Weiss plan - to destroy the main enemy forces west of the Vistula. We have already told what a mess reigned in the German headquarters before the outbreak of hostilities. Now these disagreements and disputes have flared up with renewed vigor. Rundstedt believed that it was necessary to move deep into Polish territory as quickly as possible. Halder still insisted on the encirclement of Polish troops in the Kielce-Lodz region.

In addition, the OKH continued to have "vague doubts" about the possible course of hostilities on the Western Front. After all, there the French (the English corps had not yet arrived on the continent) had at least a threefold superiority. However, the French army did not move. Why? There is no clear answer to this question, and there never will be. I would like to offer one version, the validity of which can neither be confirmed nor refuted. However, as well as others that are considered officially approved. As we remember, the Allies declared war on Germany only on September 3rd. To this day, the Poles have already given up

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Polish campaign

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across the entire western border, the "Help" army had already been annihilated. The doubts of the already hesitant French could noticeably grow stronger. Is it worth it to strain for the sake of an already broken ally? To paraphrase Bismarck: is Pomerania worth the bones of even one French grenadier? And General Gamelin decided: it's not worth it. Allegations that he expected the Poles to hold out for three or four months are clearly not serious. The first three days of the war showed that this was pure fantasy. He probably assumed the development of events according to the scenario of the last war, with the only difference being that now the French army would sit out not in field fortifications, but in the concrete casemates of the Maginot Line. And stay there until complete victory. The limited offensive launched in the Saarland on September 4 was already stopped on September 7, and on September 12 the French troops returned to their original positions. This ended their participation in the Polish campaign.

The reasons that prompted Marshal Rydz-Smigly to accept the proposal of the commander of the Poznan army, General Kutsheba, and launch a counterattack on the northern flank of the German 8th Army, also remain hidden in the dark. From the very first day of the war, this army occupied an extremely advantageous position - only German patrols were in front of it, the main battles went north and south. But the army did not move. Later, the 8th Army simply deliberately exposed its flank to Kutsheba, and again the general preferred to shift responsibility to the commander in chief. However, Marshal Rydz-Smigly caught on only when the situation became desperate. By the way, the Germans saw this danger, Rundstedt warned the commander of the 8th Army, General Blaskowitz, about possible counterattacks by the Poles, but German intelligence dispelled all fears. The Abwehr reported that the Poznan army had been transferred by rail to Warsaw! In the war against the Poles, the Germans got away with such mistakes. In the war against the Soviet Union, they paid dearly for the inability of the Abwehr to obtain even the slightest bit of reliable information about the enemy.

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On the evening of September 9, the Poles, with the forces of 3 infantry divisions and 2 cavalry brigades, attacked Blaskowitz's left-flank infantry divisions - the 24th and 30th, which were stretched along the roads, trying with all their might to catch up with the tank divisions that had gone ahead. By the evening of September 10, they began to retreat, the Poles even captured 1,500 prisoners from the 30th division. However, this was a small local success, since the offensive was poorly organized.

"In inconsistencies and fluctuations, the Poles lost three days (September 11-13). During this time, the tank units of the German 10th Army, thrown back on September 8 and 9 from Warsaw, were turned to the west by the front. On September 13, with the support of up to 200 aircraft, they went on the offensive against the armies "Poznan" and "Help", striking now from the east of Warsaw and cutting off the Polish troops' escape route. Rejecting the enemy's repeated demands for surrender, the Polish soldiers AGAIN AND AGAIN went on the attack with the hope of breaking out of the ring. However, the numerical and technical superiority of the Germans was overwhelming. Their planes continuously bombed and strafed Polish positions and troop concentration areas. Forests and villages burned. The courage of the Polish soldiers in battle amazed the Germans and led them into confusion. The Polish cavalry, armed with pikes and sabers, repeatedly rushed into desperate attacks, and the infantry marched forward with songs and fell under the blows of artillery and aircraft. The 8th Army, bearing the heaviest losses, retreated step by step to the south. The fascist German command was forced to urgently transfer an additional 15th motorized corps and other units from near Radom to the Kutno region. The Polish grouping made its way into the Kampinos forests east of Warsaw, but here it was completely surrounded and dismembered. Only a small part of it broke through to Warsaw and Modlin. By September 18, the Germans had captured about 100,000 prisoners."

The commander of Army Group South, Rundstedt, made a decision characteristic of the period of a successful blitzkrieg. Instead of meeting the Polish attack head-on, Rundstedt decided to seize the opportunity that

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to cut off and destroy the forces gathered by the Poles. The 1st and 4th Panzer Divisions, which had already reached the outskirts of Warsaw, were ordered to turn west and prevent the Poznan army from breaking through to the capital. At the same time, taking advantage of the high mobility of their troops, the Germans pulled up reserves, and the superiority in forces passed to them. Against 9 infantry divisions and 2 cavalry brigades, Rundstedt threw 19 divisions, including 5 tank and mechanized

bathrooms. When it became clear that the counterattack did not bring any special benefits and the strike force was in a dangerous position, Rydz-Smigly ordered it to retreat south to the Romanian border. It was, to put it mildly, an unreasonable order, and General Kutsheba decided to fight his way to Warsaw instead. However, the German panzer divisions struck first. It was here that the panzer generals made full use of the support of the Luftwaffe for the first time. On September 16, 820 aircraft dealt a powerful blow to Kutsheba's divisions. However, the Polish general managed to find a weak spot in the encirclement - only the 4th Panzer Division occupied positions in the north. It was here that the importance of supporting the tanks that had broken through with motorized infantry was demonstrated for the first time. The remnants of the Polish cavalry brigades, as well as 2 infantry divisions, managed to escape. The Poles resisted for another 2 days, and then for another three days the Germans were busy with the liquidation of individual centers of resistance. 120,000 soldiers were taken prisoner. The first operation of the blitzkrieg took place and ended in success, although there was almost no merit of the Germans in this. Anyone who is interested in military history can immediately name a few such cases when the attacker himself climbs into a bag that remains only to be tied. And we will see more such examples.

The counteroffensive on the Bzura gave the Poles a temporary respite, which, however, did not last long. And yet the armies "Warsaw" and "Lublin" managed to prepare for the defense of the capital. German generals later admitted that if this counter-offensive had been launched earlier, it would have brought them much more trouble. However, th

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one should not say that the course of the campaign would have changed. The fact is that already the first battles demonstrated that in two components the Germans have a decisive superiority over the enemy. The first is a much greater mobility of troops. They could quickly transfer reinforcements to the threatened area from the most distant sectors. The second is a well-established communication system. The same Kutsheba simply did not get the opportunity to gather all the forces that could participate in the counteroffensive, and Rydz-Smigly quickly lost control over the numerous armies scattered throughout the country. The saddest thing for the Allies is that they did not notice this, and during the spring campaign of 1940 the French army suffered from the same problems.

It is interesting to note that the Polish campaign is fragmentary, breaking up into several separate episodes that are loosely connected to each other. The first is the border battles, which lasted no more than 4 or 5 days. This allows us to rightly call the Polish campaign lightning-fast. Then followed the battles on Bzura, and this operation looked quite random and was not at all determined by the previous development of events. And finally, the third episode - the defense of Warsaw. It does credit to the Polish soldiers, but these battles no longer had any military or political significance, because the war had long since been lost.

In this regard, I would like to express a seditious thought. A statement that the Germans took a huge risk by concentrating almost all their forces against Poland and exposing the Western Front,

has long since moved into the "everyone already knows" category. But if you try to consider the situation objectively, it turns out that this risk was rather theoretical. The clumsy French army, which had not completed its mobilization, could not launch a general offensive immediately after the declaration of war on September 3, and already on September 7 or 8, in case of urgent need, the Germans could begin the transfer of forces to the west. This would only delay the end of Poland for another week. Moreover, as subsequent events showed,

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the actions of the French would have been as slow and unsuccessful as those of the Poles. The French army was not ready for modern warfare, so the risk to the Germans was minimal.

Let us add that the famous article in the magazine "Himes" appeared on September 29, apparently, largely under the influence of the massive bombing of Warsaw. Recall that the first massive raid was carried out on September 23, and the most powerful one followed on September 25. 1300 German planes took part in it. Taking advantage of the fact that the Polish aviation was completely destroyed, the Germans involved even L-52 transport aircraft in the bombing. On September 27, the Warsaw garrison capitulated, the Germans took another 140,000 Polish soldiers prisoner. The fact that the Modlin fortress held out until September 29 was no longer of interest to anyone and nothing

changed.

However, not only journalists used colorful epithets, but even official Soviet historians sinned with this:

"On September 19, the commander of the 8th Army gave the order to prepare a general assault, which was supposed to be completed by September 25. On the night of September 22, the Germans began artillery and aviation preparations for the final assault. A flurry of shells and bombs fell on Zolibozh, Marymont, Staroe Miasto. Two days later, the power plants and the telephone network were completely disabled, the radio went silent. The city plunged into darkness. The next day was the most difficult for the Varsovians - air and artillery strikes reached their highest strength. Wave after wave of German bombers attacked residential areas; Encountering almost no opposition, they methodically destroyed the city. Hundreds of people, covered in rubble, called for help. Hospitals, hospitals were overflowing with the wounded. The dead were buried in city squares and vegetable gardens. The lack of water made it impossible to fight fires. Warsaw was a sea of flames."

Agree, call it a dry historiographic ra

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both difficult, such a description still looks like an analysis of the tactical actions of the German troops less.

Summary. The Polish campaign provided the first examples of blitzkrieg tactics, although they were largely due to random factors. The Germans succeeded in two encirclement operations, but in the Polish corridor everything was decided by the geography of the theater, and during the fighting on the Bzura, General Kutsheba himself drove his divisions into a trap, although one should not blame him too much. He did not imagine how much higher the mobility of German formations, therefore, he did not see any particular danger to himself.

CHAPTER 5 THE BLITZKRIEG STANDARD

I think everyone who studies military history knows this battle. One of the opponents, seduced by an outwardly favorable opportunity, weakened the center of the position, moving a large force to attack the enemy flank. The other took advantage of the opportunity given to him, struck directly at the weakened center, broke through it, pinned the enemy troops to the water barrier and destroyed them, although individual groups were lucky enough to escape. Do you know? That's right, Austerlitz, 1805. I mean Sedan, 1940. Strange parallel? But if you

think about it, you will be forced to admit that in many respects the parallel is fair. The most brilliant, most famous victory of Napoleon. The most famous victory of the Wehrmacht. But the similarities don't end there. For both Napoleon and the Germans, further Wehrmacht victories drove Germany straight into the abyss.

So, after several months of a strange war, the Germans, who had released their main forces that defeated Poland, decided to move on to active operations. The original plan of attack was almost an exact copy of the unforgettable Schlieffen plan and provided for an attack on the left flank of the French army - through Belgium and Luxembourg. At the same time, troops on the Maginot Line

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They were supposed to give the French the impression by false attacks that the offensive was being prepared precisely here. But this short word "almost" meant quite serious changes. "Auftragsspielplan No. 1, Eal be", compiled by Halder, provided for a blunt frontal attack by a million army with the aim of throwing the French back across the Somme River. No maneuvers, no detours. Hitler did not like this plan, but, in the absence of alternatives, he had to agree.

The beginning of the offensive was preceded by a whole real detective story, and not even one. It all started on January 10, 1940, when a Luftwaffe light communications aircraft crashed in Belgian territory due to heavy fog. The border guards who immediately rushed in saw German officers who were burning some papers. The border guards fired several shots into the air, and the Germans surrendered. However, a little later, Major Reinberger, who was carrying these papers, started a fight in the premises of the border post. He tried to tear the burnt pieces of paper, snatch the revolver from the Belgian captain, stuff his muzzle. In general, he behaved very worthily.

Reinberger had the most compelling reasons for concern. A copy of the operational order for the 2nd Air Fleet fell into the hands of the Belgians, in which the plan of the German offensive was revealed and tasks were assigned to units and formations of the fleet. When this became known to Hitler, he went berserk. With his characteristic temperament, he promised to shoot his entire General Staff, THAT "a crowd of fools and traitors." True, the mountain gave birth to a mouse. It all ended with the removal from his post of the commander of the air fleet, General Helmut Felmi, and his replacement by Kesselring.

And then, literally on the eve of the start of the offensive, Manstein appeared, who then served as chief of staff of Army Group A. On January 12, with the permission of the commander of the army group Rundstedt, who also did not like Halder's plan, he sent a memorandum to the OKH in which he asserted - reasonably enough - that now the prospects for

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advances become obscure. Manstein tried to prove that its implementation would lead to a repetition of bloody and senseless trench battles. The statement is more than controversial. However, the main thing in Manstein's memorandum was something else - he proposed a fundamentally different plan. He was assisted in the development of the operation by Guderian, who happened to be at the headquarters of the army group at that time.

According to this plan, it was proposed to deliver the main blow to the south, in the area of Sedan, in order to cut off the Allied armies advancing into Belgium. Manstein categorically stated: "Only the implementation of this plan will result in a decisive victory over the French army." The OKH did exactly what any normal bureaucratic office is supposed to do and kicked the memorandum upstairs to the OKW, leaving the decision to the authorities. Halder declared that Manstein's proposal to reach Sedan on the fifth day of the operation was absurd. Manstein subjected the OKH to a massive bombardment of plans, sending 7 memorandums there in two months.

To get rid of an annoying subordinate, Halder chose the surest way: to remove him with a promotion. Manstein is appointed corps commander and transferred to a new duty station in East Prussia. On January 30, after the incident with the plane, a new version of the Halder plan is approved. That is, those historians who claim that it was this incident that led to the adoption of the Manstein plan are mistaken.

However, it was not possible to shelve Manstein's plan. The results of two staff games confirmed that, on the whole, he was right. Moreover, with the help of behind-the-scenes maneuvers, Manstein was summoned to Berlin, where on February 17 he presented his plan to Hitler. And the Führer approved it! After that, Halder no longer dared to object. After this, events took off at a gallop. On February 24, Brauchitsch signed a new version of the Gelb operational plan, but at the same time, Halder still managed to make his own adjustments to it, which actually emasculated Manstein's idea. A blow was envisaged, but it was not followed by a development of success.

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The regrouping of forces and preparations began, and all that was required was to appoint the commander of the strike force. It would be natural to see one of the panzer generals in this post, primarily Guderian. However, alas, he had one serious drawback - at times, at the most inopportune moment, he showed pessimism. And now, in the presence of Halder, he allowed himself to blurt out that he was not sure of success, because the tank operation was planned incorrectly. (Note in parentheses that this was true.) As a result, Panzergruppe Kleist delivered the main blow, not Panzergruppe Guderian, although the old cavalryman Ewald von Kleist was hardly the ideal commander for such an operation. Guderian remained the commander of the XX Panzer Corps. The tank group included the XIII Panzer Corps (Guderian), the XIII Panzer Corps (Reinhardt), and the V Motorized Corps (von Wietersheim).

In order to more clearly imagine what happened later, it is necessary to give the numerical strength of the German tank forces. On 1 May 1940, the ground forces included: 1077 T-1, 1092 T-P, 143 35 (®), 238 38 (®), 381 T-Sh, 290 T-U and 244 command tanks, although the actual number of tank regiments, of course, was less. But pay attention: out of 3465 tanks, 1077, or 31%, are completely worthless T-1, and another 1092 tanks, or 31%, are limitedly good T-P. That is, in fact, two-thirds of the Panzerwaffe were only suitable for parades.

And now, after 9 months of calm, the Western Front began to move. The first lightning flashed on the evening of May 9, 1940, when German troops began their invasion of Luxembourg. Night. The paratroopers of General Student landed in several places in Belgium and Holland. The most wonderful. their success was the capture of the powerful Belgian fort Eben Emmael. This operation deserves a separate detailed description, but it interests us only in the sense that the road has now been opened for the troops of Army Group B. Divisions XY] of the tank corps of Erich Göppner rushed into the gap that had opened.

This finally convinced the French that the Germans again

act according to the Schlieffen plan. General Gamelin ordered the advance of troops north into Belgium. The reaction of the German command was predictable: "For God's sake, just don't bother them!" After all, the more troops will be inside the planned boiler, the better. The mistake was aggravated by Churchill, who insistently demanded the introduction of troops into Belgian territory and insisted on the transfer of new reinforcements precisely for this. We can say that the British and French began to joyfully push each other into the trap.

At the same time, one of the ideas of the blitzkrieg was implemented - the use of air supremacy. The Luftwaffe attacked the "peacefully sleeping" Anglo-French airfields. True, General d'Astier in his report claimed that as a result of the strike on 50 airfields, only 4 aircraft were destroyed, and another 30 were damaged. Believe it or not - it's up to you.

The commander of the French 2nd Army, General Hüntziger, ordered the 2nd and 3rd Light Mechanized Divisions to attack Göppner's flank. The Germans were in trouble

position, since they had already begun to experience problems with fuel. Their infantry and artillery began to fall behind. But no one was going to slow down the offensive. The commander of the 4th Panzer Division, Lieutenant General Shtever, demanded that fuel be delivered by air.

As a result, on May 12-13, the largest tank battle at that time took place in the Khannut area, in which about 1200 tanks participated. Early on the morning of May 12, the German 4th Panzer Division attacked the positions of the French 3rd Light Mechanized Division (LMD) in the vicinity of this village.

"First there were clashes of light forces. The OTGM vehicles encountered a heavy curtain of a German tank division. Fights began between armored cars, motorcyclists and individual French 25-mm anti-tank guns. Our commanders reported by radio that they were firing at large German forces as soon as they appeared.

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French campaign

Gradually, the intensity of the battle grew, as the main forces of the 4th Panzer Division entered into action. Alas! This division was armed with T-[and T-P tanks, the fighting qualities of which we have already considered. They were opposed by Somua 5-35 and Hotchkiss H-35. They could not withstand collisions with French tanks, and the shells of even 25-mm guns pierced their thin armor like a sheet of paper with a needle. The German guns, on the other hand, could not do anything with 40 mm armor. Remember the Spanish Civil War reports? This is where the "postpone and wait" decision backfired.

All this resulted in a uniform anecdote. The commander of one of the German tanks, in complete despair from his helplessness, climbed onto the Hotchkiss and tried to break the viewing prisms with a hammer, but fell off and was crushed by the caterpillars.

On the second day, Göppner concentrated both of his panzer divisions and, with air support, broke through the front with a powerful blow. The French, who evenly spread their tanks along the front line, could not resist and began to retreat. Note: for the time being, only retreat, do not run, losing your head. It is noteworthy that even after the start of the battle, the commander of the French corps, General Priou, did not dare to bring his forces into one fist.

The French later claimed to have knocked out about 160 German tanks, losing 120 of their own. However, the battlefield was left to the Germans, who were later able to repair many of the damaged vehicles. Their irretrievable losses amounted to only 50 tanks.

It should be noted that this was not just the first tank battle of World War II. It was a landmark event that clearly showed the difference in military doctrines. The Germans noted that even armor and powerful weapons did not help the French, since their tanks had organic defects that reduced combat effectiveness. Note that the difference between the paper characteristics and the real combat value of not even a tank, but a tank is clearly visible here.

kovo connection. In addition, it turned out that the French were not able to organize the interaction of different clans.

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troops, which allowed such low-speed aircraft as LI-87 and H\$-123 to operate with impunity over the battlefield.

At this time, the difference in the insistence of the German generals in the higher headquarters and on the battlefield was already beginning to become noticeable. Goeppner was seized with a "victorious fever" and on May 14 he threw his divisions into the dug-in French infantry. The result was quite predictable: 42 tanks were burned in one day. As a result, only 137 tanks remained in the 4th Panzer Division out of 314 that were available 6 days ago. Of course, not all tanks were lost forever, some of them could be repaired, and they were repaired. However, it was much more difficult to make up for the losses in personnel.

In the center, the advance of Army Group A was slow at first, but the Germans fought not so much with the enemy as with bad roads. At the same time, the tank columns were reliably covered from the air by fighters, so the allies remained blissfully ignorant of the impending attack. However, on May 12, the Germans reached the banks of the Meuse River, where the further path was blocked by the Sedan fortress. The French were convinced that in order to storm Sedan, the Germans would have to gather large infantry forces, bring up heavy artillery, and the whole thing would take a long time, and it would be possible to prepare an assault no earlier than May 20th. This roughly coincided with Halder's calculations. For the first, but by no means the last time, old-school generals do not understand the nature of modern warfare and simply do not keep up with events. Co-: Commander of the 2nd Army, General Hüntziger ordered the 71st Infantry Division to advance to the Sedan area and took two whole days to cross 50 kilometers. As a result, the 55th Infantry Division was opposed to their tank corps, but its commander, General Lafontaine, was not too worried. He believed that he had time to better equip positions and prepare for the German strike. However, Guderian had his own plan. He had no intention of giving the French the "four to six days" they were counting on. The storm was gathering for a very long time, and then the first lightning of the blitzkrieg struck.

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On May 13, motorized infantry regiments of the 1st, 2nd, and 10th Panzer Divisions began crossing the river, but the Germans used aviation instead of artillery preparation. Goering promised Guderian a bombing strike of an unheard-of mosh and, oddly enough, kept his promise. 9 bomber squadrons made 3940 sorties during the day, bombarding the positions of the French infantry with a hail of bombs. Direct support for the German infantry was provided by dive squadrons, which made about `300 sorties. One can only wonder why the French defense did not crumble immediately, since part of the fortifications managed to hold out until the evening. Here

as described by an eyewitness:

"About noon, the Stukas appeared. Hundreds of aircraft in close formation. The Stukas operated in three groups of approximately 40 aircraft each. The first dived from 5,000 feet, two or three planes at a time, while the second circled at 12,000 feet, watching to see which targets were not destroyed by the first group. After that, she herself attacked them. The third group acted separately, picking out moving targets. After the Stukas, the Dorniers set to work again. Me-109s and heavier Me-110s buzzed around them, shooting at the slower-moving French fighters that were trying to attack the vulnerable Stukas.

The explosions of heavy bombs literally overturned the batteries and destroyed the guns. Dirt and dust jammed anti-aircraft guns. The observers in the concrete bunkers could not see anything because of the smoke and dust. All telephone lines were cut. The noise was just terrible."

Fear had big eyes, and French morale was broken. Artillery was the first to run, leaving the infantry to the mercy of fate. At 14.30 German artillery opened fire. Wherein

Guderian found an unusual use for his anti-aircraft guns, temporarily out of action. They opened direct fire on French bunkers and pillboxes. As a result, units of the 1st Panzer Division penetrated into the depths of the defense, after which the French infantry could not stand it either. Panic-stricken, the 55th Division fled, abandoning even unattacked sections of the front. "A crowd of refugees ceaselessly

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flowed straight through the village. All units of the division that were in this area - combat units, regimental headquarters, supply convoys, vehicle fleets - all fled to the south. All the officers seemed to have received an order to retreat from nowhere," General La Fontaine recalled bitterly. As a result, by the morning of May 14, the front was broken through, and not a single German tank had even managed to cross the river.

The German sappers immediately began building a pontoon bridge in the area of the 1st Panzer Division, which achieved the greatest success. The French command realized the threat of the Germans crossing the Meuse, although it did not represent the true extent of the danger. It was decided to try to destroy the crossings by air strike. But, as they say, if two people do the same thing, it is not at all necessary that they will get the same thing. German aviation completed its task. Allied - no. Guderian gathered a huge number of anti-aircraft guns in the crossing area. The basis of the air defense was the 102nd anti-aircraft regiment, to which the anti-aircraft units of the corps divisions were added. In total, 302 anti-aircraft guns were assembled. Fighter patrols were also organized.

The Allies sent 152 bombers and 250 fighters to destroy the crossing. The sky over Sedan turned into a blazing furnace. As a result, the Allies lost 114 bombers (mostly British) in one day.

To cheer up the soldiers, Guderian defiantly positioned himself on the bridge. Moreover, when the commander of Army Group A, Rundstedt, arrived, Guderian decided to report to him on the same bridge in the midst of another raid. Here is what he writes about it:

"Meanwhile, the 2nd Panzer Division crossed the Meuse at Donchery and prepared for an attack on the heights along the south bank of the river. I went there to get acquainted with the course of the battle. Having met the responsible commanders Colonels von Verst and von Prittwitz in the combat formations of the units and having talked with them, I again returned to the Maas. There, enemy planes began an intense bombardment. But extremely brave

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However, the attacking French and English troops still failed to reach the bridge. Their losses were great. The anti-aircraft artillery was celebrating its day, it fired excellently. By evening, she had on her account about 150 downed aircraft. Subsequently, the commander of the regiment, Colonel von Gippel, was awarded the Order of the Knight's Cross.

Meanwhile, the 2nd Tank Brigade was crossing the river in a continuous stream. In the middle of the day, to our common joy, the commander of the army group, Colonel-General von Rundstedt, visited us to get acquainted with the situation. I met him with a report in the middle of the bridge just in time for a new air raid. He asked dryly, "Is it always like this here?" I could sincerely confirm this. He then very warmly thanked the brave troops."

However, in addition to the anti-aircraft gunners, the pilots also distinguished themselves.

In the fighter squadrons of the II Air Corps, 14 May was later called "Fighter Day". But the most important thing was that by the evening 600 tanks crossed the river - Guderian ordered to bring up the tank regiments of the 2nd division, which was unable to expand its bridgehead. The German command (Rundstedt and von Kleist) preferred to act with
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old methods, not understanding the rapid nature of the blitzkrieg. Therefore, Guderian

received an order to gain a foothold on the bridgehead, pull up the rear, and only then think about continuing the offensive. However, Guderian thought differently. On May 14, he moved his panzer divisions further. I-I and 2-I advanced to the west, expanding the gap, and the 10th Division, with the support of the motorized regiment "Grossdeutschland", struck at the south rear of the Maginot Line. This was envisaged in Manstein's original plan, but only as a deception to keep the French in the dark as long as possible about the direction of the main attack. However, the commander of the French 2nd Army, General Huntziger himself decided to immediately attack the German bridgehead from this direction.

The commander of the X Corps, General Gransar, managed to scrape together the 4th and 7th tank battalions, armed with tanks, to attack.

kami ECM-36, which were classified as infantry support tanks. Their main drawback was speed - no more than 24 km / h, because such a tank does not need to overtake an infantryman. The tanks were supposed to support the 205th and 213th infantry regiments. However, the immediate attack failed. Panic had already begun to corrode the French army like acid. The commander of the 213th Regiment convinced General Lafontaine not to move his regiment towards the crowd of refugees in order to avoid complete chaos. The commander of the 7th tank battalion stated that he had not received any orders. The 205th regiment also delayed to let the refugees through. The commander of the 4th tank battalion simply decided to stop for the night. As a result, only on the morning of May 14, the French gathered their courage, and attacked only the 4th tank battalion and the 213th regiment. Encounter battles began, which largely repeated the experience of the clashes described above near Khannut.

The first skirmishes ended not in favor of the Germans, who lost several tanks. However, the commander of the 1st Panzer Division, General Kirchner, who crossed the river with the vanguard, managed to organize the defense. The Germans were able to use the speed and maneuverability of their tanks, as well as the trump card with which they beat the cards of all opponents for several more years - an excellently installed communication system.

German tanks, as it turned out, could bypass the French and shoot them from the flank and rear. But here we can only talk about T-Sh and T-U. By the way, as you can easily see, the Germans used the same tactics that our tankers later used in the fight against powerful but clumsy German tanks. As German historians melancholy note, light tanks once again proved their complete unsuitability for combat use. Since only 4 companies of T-T tanks entered the battle on the morning of May 13, the result is not surprising. However, they still managed to disperse the French.

The 37 mm anti-tank guns performed no better either. The only way to deal with the French tanks turned out to be rapid fire, counting on the fact that bombarded

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a hail of shells, the tank will still get at least one hit in a weak spot. However, in the same battle, the combat debut of the most successful and most terrible enemy of tanks, the 88-mm anti-aircraft guns, took place. These were slightly modified guns mounted on a 12-ton half-tracked transporter 549.8. They were part of the 8th Heavy Tank Destroyer Battalion attached to the 1st Panzer Division. Not a single tank of that time could resist these shells. Here, as part of the Grossdeutschland Regiment, for the first time self-propelled guns esO-Sh took part in the battle.

May 14 was the critical day of the operation, but the crisis was over, and the French began to gradually lose hope. On the other hand, the Germans, as in the north, went from confidence to self-confidence, and then to impudence. Their attitude towards the enemy is best described by Guderian's scene:

"Forward again, to the 1st Panzer Division! I met the division commander, accompanied by his chief of staff, Major Wenck, and asked whether the entire division could be turned to the west, or if some of the forces should be left to cover the flank, deploying them with their front to the south east of the canal

Des Arden. Wenk said, thinking aloud, "Is it worth it to get dirty!" I have often used this expression myself. The issue was resolved, the 1st and 2nd Panzer Divisions immediately received an order to turn with all their might to the right, force the Des Arden Canal and move west with the task of completing the breakthrough of the French front.

Is it really worth the hassle? But, on the other hand, this was the very weak point of the blitzkrieg tactics, which we have already spoken about - a gap is formed between the tank vanguard and the infantry. However, this disadvantage still had to be able to use, and the French did not succeed, although they made several attempts.

The sluggish start of the German offensive more and more resembled a textbook example of a blitzkrieg. Guderian and Rommel, openly violating the orders they had received to proceed with caution, continued the offensive, developing

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wow success. By the way, this detail also calls into question the reality of the blitzkrieg in the Soviet version. It was psychologically very difficult for a disciplined German general to violate an order — remember the notorious traditions of the Prussian army! But still, the command took into account the old military principle: the commander knows better on the spot. Especially if such disobedience brought good luck, otherwise the commander could share the fate of General Sponeck. But the Soviet general was constantly under the sword of Damocles. I don't want to repeat the fables about the "atrocities of the bloody gebni", we simply recommend that you re-read the memoirs of V.K. Popel "In a difficult time", which very colorfully describes the Soviet methods of command and control. Little help. You should not look at the imprint of a fresh book published by AST. The first edition was published in 1959 in "Oborongiz", the predecessor of "Voenizdat", that is, in the dense "Soviet" times! Judge for yourself exactly how Commissar Vashugin behaved, if they decided to write about it then! I suspect that he communicated with the commander of the tank corps in pure Russian with rare intersperses of literary.

But back to France. May 15 was the decisive moment of the entire campaign. In the course of not too long and not too stubborn battles, Guderian's tank corps broke into the French defenses near Sedan, and now it is time to reap the fruits of a tactical victory, turn it into an operational and even strategic victory. In a word, brilliant prospects opened before Guderian, if not for one small "but" - the prohibition to advance further before the infantry approached and gained a foothold on the bridgehead. Kleist and Rundstedt tried to turn a lightning-fast tank attack into a slow-moving infantry offensive. And Guderian decided to break the order. The order of the commander of the tank group, the order of the commander of the army group, the order of the Supreme Commander-in-Chief Adolf Hitler, who forbade the tanks to move west after crossing the Meuse. After a short meeting with

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with his headquarters, he turns the 1st and 2nd Panzer divisions to the west. Major Walter Wenck, Chief of Operations at 1st Panzer Division Headquarters, reminded Guderian of his own aphorism: "Ken, Shei Keket. Began "Run to the Sea", which ended for the Germans much more successfully than in 1914. It seems that none of the historians noticed that from that moment on, the Gelb plan turned into a pile of waste paper. The center of gravity of the operation itself shifted from Belgium to the south, into the zone of operations of Guderian's corps, which brought victory to the Germans.

On May 15, the 10th Panzer Division crossed the Meuse, and Guderian ordered it, together with the Grossdeutschland regiment, to launch a diversionary strike to the south. This maneuver was envisaged by the Manstein plan, in the development of which Guderian also took part, but Halder deleted it from the Gelb plan. Crossed out? So what?! Guderian had already committed one major violation of command orders, so such a trifle no longer bothered him.

The French tried to launch a counterattack from just this direction, and battles ensued that dragged on for several days, but did not bring much success to either side. Finally 17

In May, the German infantry divisions pulled up and replaced the 10th Panzer. Guderian is not slowly directing her to support the offensive to the west. However, this cannot be called an attack. Rather, it was an advance, or even just a forced march, as the resistance of the French had practically ceased. Here it is, blitzkrieg in its purest form – an unimpeded raid on the rear in order to encircle enemy troops in other sectors of the front.

Formally, Guderian was still in front of the so-called "Tushon's Army Group", which was later renamed the 6th Army. But with air support, the 1st Panzer Division simply dispersed the French units they encountered. The 2nd Panzer Division passed through the 53rd Infantry Division thrown towards it without even noticing it.

The situation looked more and more like a rout. The 2nd Army suffered heavy losses, the 9th Army just collapsed

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the 6th Army did not even have time to really concentrate. And all this was achieved in just three days of fighting! However, in other sectors of the front, things were going a little better for the Allies. The troops advancing to Belgium encountered units of the XU Panzer Corps of Hermann Hoth and were also defeated. Here, for the first time, the commander of the 7th Panzer Division, Erwin Rommel, who had previously been considered just one of Hitler's favorites, distinguished himself for the first time.

Panic began to spread through the French rear like wildfire. Soon literally everything was on fire - from top to bottom. On May 15, when not everything was lost and the outcome of the battle seemed not entirely clear, the French Prime Minister Paul Reynaud called the British Prime Minister Winston Churchill and shouted in hysterics: "We are beaten. We are crushed. We've lost the battle!" After that, of course, France had absolutely no chance.

Confusion and chaos reigned everywhere. One of the most powerful Allied divisions, the French 1st Light Mechanized Division, was in the Dunkirk area on 10 May. She was hastily moved north to the aid of Holland. But, when the division made a march of 220 kilometers, it met only the Dutch fleeing to the south. The division headed back south. As a result, when she met with the Nazis, out of the initially available 80 Somua 5-35 tanks, only 3 remained in service. We will meet with similar marches, countermarches, maneuvers and redeployments on other fronts ... But everywhere and always (at least in the initial period of the war), the Allied command turned out to be fundamentally incapable of promptly responding to the rapid changes in the situation.

On the morning of May 16, General Rommel's 7th Panzer Division was preparing to break through the Maginot Line, although it was advancing much further to the west. The Germans simply believed that powerful fortifications were built along the entire length of the French border. However, Rommel met only thin anti-tank obstacles and a rare chain of pillboxes. Far from in

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all the pillboxes were garrisoned, and some of them were simply locked up!

But back to the breakthrough under the Sedan. Now Guderian's advance could be hindered by only one enemy - his own command. And it tried to do it. He received his first order to stop the next day after the start of the offensive. Prompt, what can I say! On the evening of May 15, the headquarters of the Kleist Panzer Group sent a formidable directive: to gain a foothold in the bridgehead and wait for the arrival of the infantry. Although it was at this time that German tanks broke through the last line of defense of the French without much effort. Now there was nothing between them and the English Channel. A very lively telephone exchange ensued, during which Guderian succeeded in obtaining Kleist's permission "to widen the bridgehead so that the infantry corps could follow us." Guderian deliberately found an extremely vague formulation, under the guise of which he could afford to do whatever he wanted.

By the night of May 16, Guderian's tanks reached the Oise River, but on the same day, the commander of Army Group A, von Rundstedt, tried to stop the presumptuous panzer general. He was worried about the extended and completely defenseless flanks of the tank corps, which were just asking for an attack. Rundstedt did not understand that the French were simply no longer able to attack, so he set the limit line for the Beaumont-Hirson-Montcornet-Grignicourt advance, which "only the vanguards" could cross, but even those were forbidden to move more than 48 kilometers from this line. The tanks were strictly forbidden to move on.

Von Kleist, Rundstedt, Halder were amazed at the ease with which the German tanks crushed the defenses of the French armies. They constantly doubted something and were afraid of something and conveyed their fears to Hitler, who, on the initiative of the generals, delayed the offensive for two days, ordering the infantry units to be brought up. On his orders, von Brauchitsch, on behalf of the OKH, approved another "stop order". Guderian considered this a mistake and went to extreme measures.

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"After the brilliant success of May 16 and the successful battles of the 41st Army Corps, it could not have occurred to me that my commanders still thought to gain a foothold on the bridgehead at the Meuse and wait for the arrival of the infantry corps. I was completely taken over by the idea that I expressed in March at a report to Hitler, namely, to complete the breakthrough and not stop until the very coast of the English Channel. I absolutely could not imagine that Hitler himself, who approved of Manstein's bold offensive plan and did not protest against my plan to make a breakthrough, could be afraid of his own courage and stop the offensive. However, I was terribly mistaken, it became clear to me the next morning.

On the morning of May 17, I was informed from the headquarters of the Panzer Group that the offensive should be stopped, and I should appear at 7 o'clock at the landing site for a personal conversation with General von Kleist. The latter appeared exactly at the appointed time and, without answering my greeting, began to sharply reproach me for ignoring the plans of the high command. He did not say a single word about the successes of my troops. When the first storm passed and a calm set in, I asked to be removed from command. General von Kleist was surprised, then nodded his head and ordered me to transfer command of the corps to the commander after me. This ended our conversation. I went to the command post, called General Feyel and gave him command of the corps.

However, to Guderian's great relief, on the same day General Liszt appeared at his headquarters. He commanded the 12th Army, advancing behind Guderian. He reported that the commander of the army group did not approve the resignation and, moreover, authorized "active reconnaissance by large forces" on the condition that the headquarters of the corps remain at Montcornet. Guderian interpreted this permission in a very peculiar way and continued the offensive. No, the headquarters really remained in the same place, but the corps commander himself again went to the advanced units. But still, this "stop order" stole two days from him. However, there is no silver lining, tan

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the cysts got a much-needed rest and slightly repaired their cars.

The degree of confusion of the French leadership is best characterized by the fact that when Reynaud removed the commander-in-chief Gamelin on May 16, the French army was beheaded for three days, and at the most critical moment. Only on May 19, General Weygand flew in from Syria, who ... continued the strategy of passive resistance of Gamelin, but in an even worse version. The French generals still believed that the decisive force was the infantry.

Unfortunately for them, the decisive force in this battle was the tanks, supported by aircraft. However, let's be fair. If not for the skilled sappers who quickly built bridges,

capable of withstanding heavy equipment, the offensive would not take place. And anti-aircraft gunners helped protect the crossing. That is, we see an almost ideal example of the interaction of dissimilar forces. Still, tanks and aircraft played the first fiddle. In many respects, Guderian owed his success to close cooperation with von Richthofen's US air corps. Along with the advanced units were Luftwaffe liaison officers, who had their own vehicles with radios. If necessary, they called in the formidable 1-87 of O 77 and 5\$ {C 2. The head of Richthofen's headquarters later recalled with slight anguish that "never before has such a perfect system of planning and conducting joint operations been created." Dive-bombers appeared over the target no later than 20 minutes after the call. True, sometimes even this machine failed. On May 20, Guderian's headquarters was attacked by his own dive bombers, and the anti-aircraft gunners accompanying the commander were forced to shoot down one. The pilots were strangely surprised when they discovered who had been bombed. The losses in this battle of the Germans against the Germans amounted to one armored vehicle and one aircraft. But still, such overlays were single. |

At dawn on May 18, Guderian resumed his westward march. Without breaking his head too much, he appointed the entire 2nd Panzer Division as a "strong reconnaissance detachment". By the way,

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It was on these days that Guderian's troops met with the division of the French apostle of tank warfare, de Gaulle. On 17 May, his tanks attempted to drive the Germans out of Montcornet but were unsuccessful. Here is what de Gaulle himself writes:

"May 19 at dawn - into battle! The tanks of the division, overcoming a series of successive lines, moved towards Crecy, Mortier and Pouilly. They were supposed to take possession of the bridges and block the enemy's path to La Fère. The tanks were accompanied by artillery. A reconnaissance regiment and an infantry battalion provided cover for the right flank from the river side, near Baranton. Intelligence was sent in the direction of Marl. The morning went well. We reached the Ser River, putting to flight the various enemy units that had infiltrated the area. But on the northern bank of the river, the enemy was on the defensive. He firmly held the crossings and destroyed our tanks that tried to approach them. The heavy artillery of the enemy entered the battle. We came into contact with large formations of Germans moving towards Saint-Quentin. We lacked infantry and powerful artillery to force the water barrier and move the tanks forward. In those moments I could not help thinking what the mechanized army, which I had dreamed of for so long, would be capable of. If I now had such an army at my disposal to suddenly break out to Gyuiz, the advance of the German panzer divisions would immediately be stopped, their rears would be engulfed in confusion, the Northern Army Group would be able to re-link with the armies of the Central and Eastern Fronts.

However, our forces in the area north of Lahn are extremely small. Therefore, the Germans manage to force the river Ser. The day before they had begun to cross it at Montcornet, which we had already left, and from noon they also crossed at the point of Marle. They attacked our right flank on the river at Barenton and our rear at Chambry, throwing into the offensive a large number of tanks, self-propelled guns, mortars on vehicles and motorized infantry. And then there were their dive bombers. They made raids until the very night, keeping under threat. automata

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tires that could not move off-road, and openly located artillery pieces. In the afternoon I received an order from General Georges to stop the resistance. The deployment of the 6th Army was completed, and my division was supposed to be immediately used for other tasks. I decided to delay the enemy for another day, for which I concentrated the division around Worge in order to be able to deliver a flank blow to the Germans if they tried to advance from Lahn to Reims or Soissons. I postponed the crossing of the En for the next day.

Alas, de Gaulle did not achieve any serious success, although the Germans experienced some anxiety. Guderian himself. saw events differently:

"The threat from the flank was negligible; As early as May 16, we knew about the presence of a French armored division, a new formation of General de Gaulle, which, as already mentioned, first entered the battle near Montcornet. De Gaulle confirmed our data a few days later. On May 18, several tanks from his division approached within 2 km of my forward command post in the Olnon forest, guarded only by a few 20 mm anti-aircraft guns.

So, Guderian's tanks raced forward. At about midnight on May 20, that is, only 6 days after the offensive began from the bridgehead near Sedan, the tanks of the 2nd division reached the seashore near Abbeville. Guderian cut off all the Allied troops stationed in Belgium and Northern France. More than a million soldiers fell into the cauldron. There was little left to destroy this cauldron. But at that moment, the nerves of the command again lost their nerve. The sluggish and indecisive counter-attack of a handful of British tanks at Arras, which took place on May 20, frightened Brauchitsch and Rundstedt. They held up the 10th Panzer Division, which was heading towards Guderian, "just in case the fireman." However, Guderian was ready to act without her. He planned to capture Calais with the forces of the 1st Panzer Division, and move the 2nd Panzer Division to Boulogne.

Only on May 22, Kleist freed the 10th Panzer from the role of an unnecessary reserve and allowed it to follow on by

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power to Guderian. He immediately sent her to Calais, and moved the 1st Panzer to the north - to Dunkirk. After all, on May 21, German intelligence reported that the British intended to evacuate their expeditionary force through this port. On May 24, Guderian was only 24 kilometers from Dunkirk. One more small effort - and the trap will finally slam shut, especially since the tank corps of General Reinhardt has already approached. They crossed the Aa Canal, the last water barrier on the way to Dunkirk. But at that moment, Hitler gave another order to stop, and now he was formulated categorically. Only this famous "stop order" saved the British army and made the "miracle at Dunkirk" possible. German tanks stood still for three days, and this was enough for the British to take out more than 330,000 soldiers from the continent. This was the biggest mistake made by the German command during the campaign in France. It is said that Hitler gave this order for political reasons, thus he hoped to push England to peace negotiations. But this question is beyond the scope of this book.

On May 29, Guderian was ordered to withdraw his corps to the east and prepare for Operation Roth, a thrust to the south that was to finally finish off the French. Rommel's 7th Panzer Division left with him. The German command regrouped. troops, made up for losses in tank divisions. During these amazingly successful battles, the Germans lost 101 T-1, 150 T-P, 44 35 (0, 43 38 (6), 84 T-Sh, 63 T-1U and 44 command tanks. That is, all heavy relatively few medium tanks bore the brunt of the battles. Infantry divisions, which almost did not participate in the battles, had very insignificant losses. As a result, 71 French divisions were opposed by 143 German ones. What could be said here?

By the way, it would be fair if here we give data on the losses of the allies. The French lost about 1,500 tanks. The British sent 592 tanks to the continent and lost every single one. At the same time, 584 tanks were killed in the battles, and only 8 tanks remained standing on the beaches of Dunkirk.

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That is, in fact, the devil, in the sense of "Matilda", turned out to be far from being as terrible as his painted.

From the experience of the first battles, the Germans drew a conclusion, and even as many as two. First: the actions of tank groups can bring serious success. Second: for this, the tank group must have an appropriate commander. It was somehow embarrassing to remove Ewald von Kleist, who seemed to have won a victory, and he was left in command of the Kleist tank group, which now consisted of the KhU tank and ShU motorized corps. But in parallel with this, Guderian's XX Panzer Corps was transformed into the Guderian Panzer Group. The most distinguished divisions of his corps (1st and 2nd Panzer) became part of the new XXXIX Panzer Corps, plus Guderian received the XY Panzer Corps. Everything was ready for the last act of the tragedy.

The Germans launched an offensive on June 5 on the western sector of the front. The French resisted as best they could, but strength breaks straw, and after two days of fighting the front was broken through. After that, the defense of the French fell apart, and the operation moved into the stage of persecution.

In the east, the offensive began on June 9, and in fact repeated the scenario of the battles near Sedan. First, the infantry crossed the Aisne River, and then Guderian's tanks entered the gap, which began a rapid advance into the depths of France, leaning east to reach the Swiss border and cut off the French armies on the Maginot Line. On May 10, XXXIII Panzer Corps had to beat off a counterattack by French tanks, suffering serious losses. However, the pace of advance was not reduced. |

Guderian created the second giant cauldron. The Kleist tank group, deployed to the breakthrough area, moved straight to the south. On June 14, Paris fell, and on June 16, the French asked for a truce. The first lightning campaign was successfully completed.

Summary. The first campaign in which the German army managed to fully realize all the ideas of the blitzkrieg. At the same time, the Germans very successfully combined large and small

blitzkrieg, as the lightning breakthrough of the tank troops led to the equally rapid collapse of France. However, the Wehrmacht achieved all this thanks to the stubbornness and disobedience of the commander of the XX Panzer Corps, Heinz Guderian. If the German army on the Western Front acted in strict accordance with the points of the Gelb plan, there would be no need to even dream of any blitzkrieg. And so it turned out to be an ideal variant, which even the Germans themselves were not able to repeat even once.

Chapter 6 A LIGHTNING ROAD TO ANYTHING

After the end of the campaign in France, the German command was at a loss for some time. The fighting ended too quickly, no one expected anything like this. For a while, Hitler was busy frightening the British with Operation Sea Lion, but this waterfowl glued his flippers together before he could plunge into the waters of the English Channel. And then it was decided to deal with Soviet Russia. Directive number 21| called the Plan Barbarossa. In fact, it was not a sin for the Fuhrer to think for a minute before signing this plan. Emperor Frederick Barbarossa really became famous for trying to realize his personal version of "drang nach Osten" by going on a crusade. But this event ended completely senseless and shameful - the emperor drowned in some unknown river on the way to the goal. If you wish, you can see in this. Some ominous omen. However, in December 1940, no one in Germany thought about it - the victory euphoria was too strong.

What was the balance of power before this new campaign? It was practically the same as in all other campaigns of the Wehrmacht - very bad for the Germans. The funny thing is that some modern historians are again trying to sing the old song about "six or even

eightfold superiority of the Germans in tanks. How does this happen? Well, for starters, a fable is being launched that we were simply forced to build 28,000 tanks, of course, to defend the borders from imperialist aggressors - the USSR has such a long border. A tank attack by the British army in the Naryn-Mar region was considered especially probable. Or German - through the ridges of the Kyrgyz Ala-TGoo. Further into the world, a terrible argument appears.

number two: Soviet intelligence reported that by June 1941 it was likely that the Wehrmacht would use captured tanks, after which the number of Panzerwaffe increased to 10-11 thousand units. Sorry. If Soviet intelligence determines the number of German tanks with an accuracy of 6,000 units, or 200%, then how can it put the plan "Barbarossa" or "Citadel" on Stalin's table before Hitler reads it? And if, on the contrary, Soviet intelligence sees and knows everything, the story about 10,000 German tanks is a deliberate and blatant lie. Choose for yourself what you like best.

But the historians of the last wave do not stop there. The party gave the directive - to prove it, and they prove it. There are wise arguments about the division of tanks into categories depending on the technical condition. From the figure of 28 or 24 thousand tanks, tanks subject to overhaul are immediately deducted, the third category, and so on. At the same time, it is immediately tacitly postulated that the Germans have every single tank sparkling with factory grease and freshly replaced parts. And here, they say, they require major repairs and at least 25% of tanks are completely incompetent. But to stop there would be failure to fulfill the party's task. Therefore, arguments begin that tanks of the "second category", that is, "current repairs", are also for the most part unfit for combat. And their batteries are leaking, and the tracks are crooked, and the motor resource has been completely exhausted. As a result, we have only tanks of the "first category" in the bottom line, but not all of them either. They did not have time to master them and did not carry out pre-sale preparation.

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In general, hardly 10% of our 28,000 tanks remain. That is, superiority passes to the Germans. Of course, not six times, but still - they already have more. However, this raises another reasonable question. And what should be done with the commander of a mechanized corps, who out of 600 tanks has only 60 combat-ready tanks? Personally, I wouldn't shoot it, no. I would hang it. Publicly. On the square. As an enemy of the people and a pest. So gentlemen, historians must choose. Either the Red Army still had more than 20,000 tanks, or its command staff was entirely staffed with spies, pests, enemies of the people, or, at best, impenetrable idiots. It is impossible to reconcile both hypotheses.

Let us leave for now the question of the number of Soviet tanks and turn to the German ones. The Wehrmacht began preparations for the invasion of Russia by doubling the number of panzer divisions and forming two more panzer groups. An indirect sign that all this was considered a long-term serious measure is that the tank groups received standard serial numbers instead of names, as was the case during the fighting in France. The Kleist Panzer Group is something fickle and short-lived, but the 1st Panzer Group is, as it were, forever.

However, from such an increase in the number of divisions and groups of tanks in the German army did not increase. During the reorganization of the Panzerwaffe, the divisions were simply divided in half. However, I would not be in a hurry to laugh merrily at this measure. There were some grounds for it, and it brought certain benefits. Considering the length and depth

new theatre, the Germans desperately needed new panzer divisions. But the industry could not give so many tanks, so the Germans had to dodge, relying on their meager resources. And the benefits were obvious. If they had left the same number of divisions, then the tank groups would have been able to form all the same two pieces as in France, and, as a result, military operations on the Eastern Front would have taken a completely different turn. So it's possible

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say, the Germans showed ingenuity and impudence, presenting the "doll" to the Soviet command. On top were hundreds of bills, but inside, although the most real, but only three rubles.

But there was another change in the structure of the Panzerwaffe, which not everyone notices, despite its serious influence on the course of hostilities. As we have repeatedly emphasized, the secret

The success of the blitzkrieg was in the well-established interaction of different types of troops. And at the lower level there was an unofficial reorganization of the tank units. She is rarely noticed, most likely precisely because of this informality. In almost every tank division, non-standard, but fairly stable regimental battle groups were formed. That is, now the commander of a tank regiment did not have to contact the division headquarters to get help from motorized riflemen, sappers or scouts, they were directly subordinate to him. The system of interaction with the Luftwaffe was also further developed. There were now Luftwaffe liaison officers in every division, and often in every regiment.

By the way, this already shows that the prospects for the German blitzkrieg in Russia looked rather vague. The scope of the forthcoming operations was ten times greater than in the West. The Germans simply did not have enough strength to implement the plan. If before the Battle of Kursk many German generals frankly did not believe in the success of the operation precisely for this reason, then before the start of the invasion of the USSR, for some reason, these doubts did not visit anyone. Intoxication with victories is a dangerous state, because it is not without reason that the state of intoxication has long been considered an aggravating circumstance in the Criminal Code.

We will not, as Suvorov-Rezun suggests, divide German tanks into square kilometers of territory; T-Sh in the Chukotka tundra would look somewhat surreal. But let's look at the Barbarossa plan with an abstract, cold eye. It was drawn up taking into account the available forces, but already in the section of tasks there is a clear discrepancy between the forces and the goals set. To destroy at the same time

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to defeat the enemy along the entire length of the front from the Baltic to the Black Sea, each of the three army groups needed two tank groups. That is, by elementary arithmetic, we get the result that six tank groups were required, while Germany had only four. Most she lacked neither tanks nor tankers. By the way, can it be considered a coincidence that in the final period of the war the Red Army had exactly six tank armies? That is, already at the planning stage, the OKW laid the foundation for the future defeat of the Wehrmacht. Well, if Germany could not, in principle, put up the required forces, why even start a war? No, of course, the Germans could divide each of the two available tank groups into halves and three parts, but that would have turned out to be cat's tears...

No less of a problem was the depth of future operations. A march of 500 kilometers along decent European roads, the German tanks still withstood. Of course, they were more reliable than the Soviet ones, and the repair service in the Wehrmacht tank divisions worked much better than ours, but all the same, it was necessary to take into account the completely inevitable percentage of breakdowns and failures. And then calculate how many tanks will not withstand even a simple march on Moscow, without any zigzags and loops dictated by the course of hostilities, even without combat losses. In a word, one gets the impression that when planning, the German generals did not take into account completely objective geographic factors that in no way depended on the size, level of training and combat effectiveness of the Red Army. By the way, with this last factor, the Germans also had an overlay. Everyone remembers Hitler's famous phrase that he would think ten times before attacking the Soviet Union if he knew how many tanks Stalin had.

With this in mind, it is not surprising that the German blitzkrieg, so successful at the beginning of the war, fizzled out about 700-800 kilometers from the border (by the way, again, a striking coincidence with the depth of continuous operations in the West), and

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the Germans needed an operational pause to put the Panzerwaffe in order. But this pause in itself meant the collapse of the great blitzkrieg. Lightning war did not work out, and could not work out in principle, despite all the tactical and operational successes of the blitzkrieg
small.

The German command did not take into account another factor, namely the total nature of modern warfare, when it is not enough to defeat the armed forces of the state, it is still necessary to break its political system. Of all the lessons of the campaign in the West, the German generals saw only those that they wanted to see. The French army was quickly defeated - that was the end of France. But the fact that the defeat of the British army did not at all lead to the surrender of Great Britain, no one wanted to notice. For all sorts of uncomfortable moments, Hitler and his generals simply turned a blind eye.

And now let's try to consider what the 1st (Kleist), 2nd (Guderian), 3rd (Goth) and 4th (Goeppner) tank groups managed to do, each of which, alas, was no stronger Soviet mechanized corps, and what they failed to do.

So, on June 22, 1941, German troops crossed the border of the Soviet Union along its entire length - from the Baltic to the Black Sea. Recently, many spears have been broken to prove that Germany nevertheless declared war on the USSR and there was no treacherous attack. Indeed, some notes were presented both in Berlin and in Moscow. But when? Apparently, after the start of hostilities. Moreover, if you look through the memoirs of the German generals, it turns out that some of them, for example, the enterprising Walter Model, began hostilities earlier than it was foreseen by the orders of the command. For tactical reasons, Model decided to capture an important bridge an hour before the start of the offensive announced by order. And you think that he was the only one of the generals who committed such a violation? Therefore, from any point of view, the German attack on the USSR was indeed treacherous and treacherous, and there simply cannot be two opinions here.

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However, even this treachery cannot explain everything that happened next. But let's start in order, from north to south. The actions of Army Group North and the 4th Panzer Group of Oberst General Erich Göppner, which was part of it, were simple and uncomplicated. The Germans moved forward without bothering with any cunning maneuvers, detours or attempts to arrange a boiler. This was partly due to the difficult terrain - forests, swamps, numerous rivers. But, most likely, the reason was the very one that we pointed out - an elementary lack of strength. Göppner had only 3 panzer divisions in his two corps, so he could only do what he could.

It is difficult to explain the events of the first days of the war in the zone of Army Group North. Let's start with the simplest. ShU1 tank corps of General Manstein was supposed to capture an important railway bridge across the Western Dvina River, the general himself writes about this in his memoirs. However, at the same time, none of the historians notices one small detail. As the immediate task of the corps, a target located almost 300 kilometers from the border was indicated! Manstein once casually reports:

"If the corps wanted to fulfill the task assigned to it to seize the undestroyed bridges across the Dvina near Dvinsk (Daugavpils), then after breaking through the border positions, it was necessary to do the following.

On the first day of the offensive, the corps had to advance 80 km in depth in order to capture the bridge across the Dubissa near Airogola. I knew the line of Dubissa since the First World War. The site was a deep river valley with steep slopes inaccessible to tanks. During the First World War, our railway troops built a model wooden bridge across this river within a few months. If the enemy succeeded in blowing up this large bridge near Ayrogola, then the corps would be forced to stop at this line. The enemy would buy time to organize a defense on a steep bank on that side of the river that would be difficult to break through. It was clear that the

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July 25, 1941 Red Banner Baltic Fleet The territory of the Klaipeda region, captured by the fashionista Germany in the dead of 1939

Operation Barbarossa. border battle

in which case there was nothing to count on a sudden seizure of bridges near Dvinsk (Daugavpils). The crossing at Ayrogola gave us an indispensable springboard for this."

And the bridge was captured by the 8th Panzer Division. If in the West an advance of 30 kilometers a day was considered fast and deserved to be called a "blitzkrieg", then what is the name of a daily march of 80 kilometers? By the way, the most interesting thing is that the record for the speed of advance did not belong to tank units at all, but to the modest 291st Infantry Division from General Kuchler's 18th Army, which advanced almost 100 kilometers. After that, stories about stubborn battles on the border look somehow unconvincing.

On the morning of June 26, the same 8th Panzer Division approached the aforementioned bridges over the Dvina and captured them. Apparently, out of complete confusion, the Germans immediately captured the city of Dvinsk itself. The Soviet 20th Airborne Brigade "tried to hold the city for several hours", but these "several" turned out to be equal to either two or three.

The HI tank corps of General Reinhardt lagged behind its neighbor a little and reached the Dvina near Jekabpils a day later. There was a good reason for this: Reinhardt had to repulse the counterattack of the 3rd mechanized corps in the Ra-

,now. There, the 6th Panzer Division got into a rather difficult bind, the forces of Major General Kurkin were too large - 672 tanks, of which 109 were new T-34s and KVs. By the way, the commander of the 6th Panzer General Landgraf had no illusions about the combat capabilities of his tanks - captured Czech 35 (I) - and ordered them not to engage in battle with Russian tanks. The order was executed. Infantry had to fight off the attack of Soviet tanks. The Germans survived several unpleasant hours, but the Soviet units attacked separately,

one by one, and all attacks were repulsed. It was not possible to detain the Germans for a long time. Apparently, it was here that Reinhardt lost the very one day by which he lagged behind Manstein on the way to the Western Dvina.

By the way, when it came to direct confrontations,

the wisdom of General Landgraf's order was visible

appears to the naked eye. General Raus recounts how his 1st Panzer Regiment, faced with Russian tanks, was forced to withdraw "in order to avoid total annihilation." And the report of the Soviet Information Bureau refers to the destruction of 300 German tanks near Raseinay. Modern Russian sources describe it somewhat differently:

"Having met the enemy on the western bank of the Dubyssa River, the 2nd Panzer Division began to deploy the 2nd Motorized Rifle Regiment in battle order, which was supposed to cover the concentration of both tank regiments. Fighting began on the morning of June 23. The 3rd and 4th tank regiments brought up the lagging equipment and put it in order after a long and difficult march. Soon the left flank of the division was outflanked by enemy tanks. 6 tanks of the 3rd TP were sent to the dangerous area, which drove the Germans back, knocking out 2 tanks and putting 7 to flight.

One way or another, the Germans preferred not to get involved with the KV tanks, no matter how much they lost, and this episode serves as clear evidence that any memoirs should be treated with caution. Do not reject them out of hand, but simply do not trust recklessly, no matter who writes the memoirs: a Soviet general, a German field marshal or an American admiral. Alas, the successful actions of individual tanks did not translate into successful actions of the corps. During short battles, the 3rd mechanized corps lost up to 80% of its tanks. The only good thing that can be said about General Kurkin is that he managed to withdraw a handful of fighters from the German rear, while losing all the equipment and heavy weapons. It was these generals who provided the tanks of Manstein and Reinhardt with a lightning-fast march forward.

The Red Army tried to give the first serious battle to the Germans on the banks of the Western Dvina, since the front commander, General F.I. Kuznetsov received an order to detain the enemy at this line. Until now, unfortunately, the Soviet troops only indicated resistance.

Further events are described more than vaguely and inaccurately.

but, again, both Soviet and German sources. Attempts to recapture Dvinsk ended in failure, and the commander of the front, General Kuznetsov, in his report to Moscow, talking about the events of June 27, contradicts himself. Then some consolidated regiments attack his city, and three lines below - the 46th tank division of the 21st mechanized corps. On June 28, Dvinsk was attacked again, this time by the forces of the entire 2nd mechanized corps of General Lelyushenko. And again the attacks were repulsed, although the corps received 105 new tanks no later than June 24th. Moreover, the history of Khalkhin Gol was repeated again, only in an even worse version. Lelyushenko's 42nd Panzer Division ran into the German 1st [21st Infantry Division] that had just crossed the Dvina and was driven back. That is, in 1941, the oncoming battle of the German infantry with tanks, in theory, fatal for the infantry, ends with the defeat of the tanks.

And then there are works from the genre of "non-science fiction", to which one can without hesitation include the book by D.D. Lelyushenko "Moscow-Stalingrad-Berlin-Prague". It colorfully depicts tank rams, hand-to-hand combat, passing from hand to hand at home. Well, and, of course, the fascists running in panic. No, all this, of course, will be. There will also be battering rams, which we will tell from the words of the Germans themselves, and there will also be German divisions fleeing in panic, which the German generals will be forced to confirm. Only it will not be here and not now.

Our generals took credit for the fact that they managed to delay Manstein's offensive, although he himself was not going to attack anywhere. The fact is that the commander of Army Group North, Field Marshal von Leeb, managed to violate almost all the laws of military art. His tank corps, which had stood side by side on June 22, were now separated by a considerable distance.

Moreover, the corps themselves turned out to be scattered divisionally. The infantry was hopelessly behind, which is why Manstein was forced to stand, who was waiting for the approach of the P Army Corps. The offensive of Leeb's troops took on some kind of chaotic character, divisions

they simply rolled in a wave, and a semblance of organization appeared only in those cases when the Germans encountered more or less stubborn resistance. Western historians dispassionately state: Leeb did not allow Goeppner to bring both of his corps together, and this situation continued to the very suburbs of Leningrad. The 18th Army operating on the Baltic coast was too weak and acted alone at its own peril and risk. |

By the way, here is a small episode that still shows the difference in the methods of work of Soviet and German generals. Manstein says again:

"In these battles, I remember one small episode, which was perceived by my subordinates not without an admixture of a sense of gloating. Whoever commanded a tank corps in such battles knows that, no matter how surprising was the rapid advance of the German troops forward, in order to continuously pursue the enemy, the troops, nevertheless, always need the presence of the highest commanders in the advanced units and spurring on their part. So I once arrived at the headquarters of one battle group 8 to, the advance of which was stopped due to enemy artillery fire. At first I thought, judging by the nature of the fire, that it was enemy harassment fire along this high road, which should not stop our advance. As soon as I had time to express this opinion, the enemy artillery brought down on us a hurricane of fire, which forced us to quickly take cover in the cracks. My faithful driver Nagel, who wanted to quickly get the car out of the shelling area, was wounded, but, fortunately, only lightly. While we, sitting in our cracks, waited out the shelling, the gentlemen from this headquarters could not hide their gloating at the fact that the corps commander was so well taught by the facts. Then we all laughed sincerely and then moved on."

You can also laugh at others. One of the modern historians in the collection "The Gragedy of 1941. Causes of the Catastrophe" first enthusiastically retells Lelyushenko's fables about Manstein's practically destroyed corps and then,

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Without taking a breath, he declares: "But the staffing continued to remain close to the regular one." And to make his words sound more convincing, he cites the number of tanks in General Geppner's group, referring to the first volume of Thomas Yenz's capital work Panzertruppen, pages 190-191. Well, we are not lazy, we open the mentioned pages of this book and see... What do we see? Table of the number of equipment in the German tank divisions on June 22. Sorry, forgeries need to be done more carefully, not even an hour will be caught by the hand.

On the other hand, the state of the Soviet troops is best characterized by the report of the front headquarters dated June 30 on the state of the 27th Army, which advanced from the rear and has not yet taken part in the battles. The whole army has 4296 people! I do not undertake to explain this.

By the way, the same author writes: "Two divisions of the | th mechanized corps - the 1st tank division were sent to the Pskov region from near Krasnogvardeysk (Gatchina) by rail ..." Let us recall that we are talking about the events of June 30 . And after that, how do you order to be with the directive of the Headquarters No. 00329 of July 14, which requires "a tank division (the same one, do not hesitate!) From the Kandalaksha region to be immediately transferred to Leningrad." In my opinion, these are the historians who dig holes for future catastrophes, but I do not impose my opinion on anyone.

In general, the actions of both opponents in the Baltics in the first weeks of the war can be characterized briefly: some in the woods, some for firewood. Only the Germans were more fortunate, and they continued their rapid offensive, although von Leeb was really asking for a good lesson. And the „ question, where did one and a half thousand tanks of General Kuznetsov go, remained unanswered.

Events took a much more dramatic turn. The fundamental difference in the situation here was that it included two tank groups, and therefore Field Marshal von Bock could more freely maneuver forces. In addition, every

Army Group Centre.

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one of these panzer groups was stronger than Geppner's group.

The task of the von Bock group was to encircle the Red Army units in the Minsk region with a subsequent offensive in the direction of Vitebsk-Orsha. Panzer groups were located on the flanks of the group, and infantry armies occupied the gap between them. The plan of the German command was mortally dangerous, since a gigantic cauldron was conceived, the liquidation of which could take a very long time. Events unfolded differently, but even the most favorable course of hostilities turned out to be fatal for the Germans, although not all historians noticed this. The fact is that the last reserve of the OKH, the XXXU army corps, was transferred to the Army Group Center. However, very quickly it had to be thrown to the front, turning it into the 2nd Army. After that, until the very end of the war, there were no more reserves at the disposal of the German command that deserve this name. Two critical moments can serve as the best illustration of this: the attempt to release the Paulus army at Stalingrad and the Battle of Kursk. In both cases, the maximum that the OKH could find was a couple of divisions, although a whole army was needed. But at the disposal of the Soviet command already in June 1941 there were armies of the second echelon, Far Eastern reserves and

etc.

According to the plan, the 3rd Panzer Group of General Hoth was to advance eastward from the Suwalki area with maximum speed in order to reach Minsk as soon as possible. The 3rd Panzer Group Gotha was temporarily attached to the 9th Army.

The strike of Army Group Center was as sudden as that of Army Group North. Panzer group Gota immediately captured three important bridges across the Neman and began to move deep into Soviet territory. But then, quite unexpectedly, the German pilots turned the leg on their own tankmen. The rear columns of the US Air Corps did not wait for the tanks to pass, and rushed forward, mixing with the vehicles of the 7th Panzer Division of General von

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Funk. This mess continued until the German columns collided with the T-34s of the 5th Panzer Division. Only after that did the German pilots decide to act more prudently.

Guderian also cheerfully declares that a complete surprise attack was achieved and he conducted artillery preparation for one and only reason - it was so planned. The crossing of the 2nd Panzer Group through the Bug passed without delay, and although the Brest Fortress fought, this did not delay the German tanks. They simply went around it to the right and left and moved on, leaving the infantry to deal with the stubborn garrison. Guderian himself moved with the advanced units, which should be considered inappropriate. In combat formations, the commander of a tank division must follow for sure, the commander of a corps - perhaps, but even with a well-organized German communications system, the army commander will not be able to control all his troops, being at the forward command post. |

The pace of advance of Guderian and Hoth was no less than that of Manstein and Reinhardt. If you look at the map in the sixth volume of the Soviet Military Encyclopedia, we will see that on June 23 Guderian's vanguards entered Bereza, that is, they covered 100 kilometers in a day. On June 24, Hoth's tanks occupied Vilnius, covering about 120 kilometers in two days. The pace of advance was absolutely exceptional.

So, by the end of the first day of fighting, German tanks broke into the operational space, and von Bock gave Hoth complete freedom of action, which he took advantage of by expanding the gap between the Soviet 3rd and 11th armies to 150 kilometers.

Late in the evening of June 22, People's Commissar of Defense Marshal Tymoshenko sent the famous Directive No. 3 to the troops, which he will be remembered more than once. The main thing in it was that the Soviet armies were required to go on the offensive. Against the Army Group Center, the Red Army had significantly more forces than against the von Leeb group, but this did not bring practically any benefit, and

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now historians claim that Tymoshenko failed to use these forces. However, a significant part of the accusations against Tymoshenko is purely scholastic in nature, although it is pointless to deny his guilt on many points. For example, they write that he failed to establish interaction between the troops of the North-Western and Western fronts. Yes it is. But remember that Goth's tanks divided these fronts, by the way, quite unintentionally. Just such was the geography of the theater of operations. And the Germans themselves did not sin by coordinating actions at the strategic level. In any case, von Leeb and von Bock did not help each other in any way and did not coordinate their plans and actions.

It all started with a counterattack by the 11th mechanized corps near Grodno. Our historians write that he managed to push back the German XX corps for 6 kilometers, but under the blows of German aviation the corps was forced to retreat, and on June 23 the city of Grodno was abandoned. Again, look at the map. Grodno is located about 50 kilometers from the border. It turns out that on the first day of the war, the Germans traveled 50 kilometers there, and even 6 back, and then in the morning of June 23 again forward. Isn't that too much? Or did the success of the counterattack remain entirely on the pages of Soviet books? If we look at maps in "alternative" publications, we will notice that indeed the German 129th Infantry Division was moving much slower than its neighbors, but even it did not think of retreating. And another question. Why did only the 29th Panzer Division take part in the counterattack, while the 33rd Panzer and 204th Mechanized Divisions took a position of non-intervention? The statement that the 33rd Panzer was 40 kilometers from the area of the upcoming battle against the backdrop of the pace of advance of the German troops sounds simply ridiculous. However, whoever wants - will always find a reason. But is Marshal Timoshenko to blame for what happened? Or is it the fault of the corps commander, General Mostovenko, who failed to gather his forces?!

Then things got even worse. In order to eliminate the German breakthrough from the area of the Suwalki ledge, the commander of the Northwestern Front, General D.G. Pavlov

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ordered his deputy, General Boldin, to form a strike group consisting of the 6th and 11th mechanized and 6th cavalry corps in order to "strike in the general direction of Bialystok-Lipsk, south of Grodno, with the task of destroying the enemy on the left bank of the Neman River.

But this was already a very serious mistake. It seems that Pavlov did not even remotely imagine the current situation, because he was aiming a powerful tank grouping of more than 1300 tanks and 370 cannon armored vehicles at enemy infantry divisions, whose only concern was not to be too far behind the tank divisions that had gone ahead. buildings. The blow was aimed at the 102nd and 129th infantry divisions of the XE of the German army corps. Neither Guderian's tank corps, advancing even further south, nor Hoth's tank corps, moving north, were hindered or threatened by this blow. Pavlov supposed to cut off Goth's tanks that had gone ahead, but the fact is that at that very time, General Lemelsen's tank corps from Guderian's group was already in the rear of the group being formed, which literally hung in the air.

By the way, there is a strange confusion here, which is extremely difficult to explain. For some reason, almost all of our historians write that the German USh and XX corps were the target of the strike. But at the first glance at the map, it is clear that the USh corps was advancing north of Grodno and was on the right bank of the Neman. In addition to the aforementioned two divisions of the Army Corps, the 162nd and 256th Infantry Divisions of the XX Corps fell into the offensive zone. That is, the balance of power was even less favorable for the Germans than, for example, M. Solonin points out.

Thus, not for the first and not for the last time, an ideal situation developed for Soviet tank crews - a head-on battle with infantry divisions was coming. Agree, after a 50-kilometer march, the Germans had neither the time nor the strength to prepare at least a semblance of defensive positions. Mention that the Boldin group in terms of the number of tanks and armored vehicles surpassed any of the tank groups

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Wehrmacht, already just superfluous. In addition, Boldin received a regiment of heavy howitzers from the High Command reserve.

| Interestingly, the Germans completely overlooked the concentration of these huge forces. The explanation is simple - the Luftwaffe conducted reconnaissance of the Soviet rear, and they simply did not consider it necessary to observe the Bialystok area. In general, ideal conditions for a small blitzkrieg. Alas... June 23 began the offensive of Boldin's group, and two days later it ended, and ended with its complete defeat. Worse, the Germans barely noticed this counterattack. The combat logs vaguely mention a small crisis at the 256th Infantry Division in the Grodno region, but the division dealt with it on its own. Halder writes about the same, noting that all Russian attacks were repulsed by the evening of June 23rd.

By the way, the funny thing is that you can read the memoirs of General Boldin very carefully, but you will not find any mention of an offensive or counterattacks there. It is strange that neither M. Solonin nor V. Beshanov, who referred to this book, noticed this simple fact. All Boldin confines himself to is a retelling of his conversations with the commander of the 6th mechanized corps, General Khatskilevich, with the commander of the front, General Pavlov, with Marshal Kulik, who somehow found himself in his headquarters. But only.

"And in combat conditions, the 6th Corps showed its best side. In the zone where he was defending, the Nazis, despite repeated attempts, did not manage to break through. The corps suffered losses, but it was still combat-ready and could, if not with full force, counterattack.

... I called Khatskilevich, who was in the units.

"Comrade General," came his excited voice, "we are running out of fuel and ammunition. Tankers fight bravely. But without shells and fuel, our machines become helpless. Give only everything you need, and we will deal with the Nazis.

There was not even a shadow of bragging in Khatskilevich's words. They sounded the deep faith of the commander in his fighters, the confidence that the enemy can be beaten with great success. I cos

bulk his position. Run out of fuel, and the tanks will stop. And this is a losing battle. People and equipment will perish, an excellent mechanized corps will cease to exist, and the path will be opened to the enemy.

"Hear me, comrade Khatskilevich," I strained my voice, trying to shout over the terrible rumble of enemy planes flying over us. — Hold on! I will immediately take all measures to provide help.

We have no connection with the headquarters of the front. Therefore, immediately after the conversation with Khatskilevich, I sent a letter to Minsk by plane, in which I asked to urgently organize the transfer of fuel

and ammunition by air. Unfortunately, both this plane and the second one that took off then died without reaching the target. It is hard to realize that all attempts to help the tankers are unsuccessful...".

That's all that General Boldin was able to tell about the counterattack of 1000 tanks under his command. In the surviving documents of the 6th and 11th mechanized corps, you will also not find a single word about the counterattack itself. After that, a reasonable question arises: did it even take place? No, of course, some movements were made, but, most likely, this happened in exactly the same way as in the north. Scattered, uncoordinated attacks from either a tank battalion or an infantry regiment, which the Germans easily repulsed. The destruction was horrendous. In the 11th mechanized corps, with which, by the way, Boldin lost contact on the second day of the war, after 4 days of fighting, 30 tanks out of 305 and 600 men out of 32,000 remained. The 6th mechanized corps simply melted away without a trace. |

But Boldin tells a fantastic tale about how, wandering around the German rear, he defeated the tank column he met, destroying 12 German tanks in 3 minutes. It would also be very cool if General Boldin explained where on June 27 a column of 28 German tanks appeared on a forest country road. The fact is that by this time the tanks of Goth and Guderian were already in the area of Minsk and Bobruisk, but not in the Nalibokskaya pu

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shche, through the wilds of which the brave general wandered. So there are strong suspicions that Boldin is simply lying.

"After resting and gaining strength, we moved on. There are already about thirty of us. We are slowly moving east. Kritsin is getting worse. He jumps on a good leg, with one hand resting on a knotty stick, the other on someone's shoulder. We walked five hundred meters. I see that the lieutenant's face is covered with perspiration, but he is silent, does not complain. We made a small halt. Flasks of water passed from hand to hand. We drink sparingly."

This is how the counterattack of the cavalry-mechanized group ended, which was formally stronger than any of von Bock's tank groups. 30 people instead of three buildings. The first Soviet blitzkrieg did not fail, it simply did not take place. |

But the Germans completed their task. On June 28, the German 12th Panzer Division entered Minsk, but the result was not a cauldron, but a "half-cauldron", because Guderian's tanks were moving east, towards Moscow, and not northeast towards Goth. Only in the afternoon of June 29, his 18th Panzer Division met with the tankers of Goth. Now even as many as three boilers have formed: Minsk, Bialystok and Novogrudok. However, the term "cauldron" in this case seems to be incorrect, since there were no organized Soviet units and formations there, just as there was no organized resistance. From the two armies there were scattered groups of soldiers and officers who tried to seep out. Therefore, it seems to us, it would be more correct to speak of three cordon zones.

In the zone of the Army Group "South", things for the Germans at first did not go as smoothly as they would like. As the old joke says, there were thirty-three reasons for this. First, here the lack of forces was most clearly manifested. The Germans were forced to give up significant sections of the front to the allies: the Hungarian divisions of dubious combat capability and the Romanian divisions, frankly incompetent. In addition, the 1st Panzer Group, which was part of the army group, was commanded by General Oberst Ewald von Kleist, whom we knew from the battles in France, a good, probably, gene.

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ral, but who had a rather vague idea of the tactics of tank formations, which he had already demonstrated in France. Yes, commanders. hulls, with the exception of von Wietersheim, were also good, but nothing more. And so it happened that from the very beginning on

In the southern sector, the Germans got involved in protracted border battles. Well, it is generally better to remain silent about what happened in the zone of the 4th Romanian Army.

The most notable event on this sector of the front was the so-called tank battle near Brody-Dubno, in which the mechanized corps of the Southwestern Front tried to stop von Kleist's 1st Panzer Group. From our side, 5 mechanized corps participated in the battle, numbering about 2500 tanks, including 720 T-34 and KV tanks, from the German side - 4 divisions, which had about 800 tanks. And again, from the offensive of the Soviet troops, it turned out what it turned out.

On the evening of June 22, People's Commissar of Defense Marshal Timoshenko ordered a strike by the forces of the 5th and 6th armies in the direction of Lublin, to encircle and destroy the enemy group advancing on the front from Vladimir-Volynsky to Krystynopol. By the way, if the Barbarossa plan was well known to us, then why doesn't Timoshenko's order directly say: "6th Army and the 1st Panzer Group"? General Kirponos decides to form two strike groups. The 22nd, 9th and 19th mechanized corps are included in the northern one, and the 4th, 8th, 15th mechanized and 37th rifle corps are included in the southern one. So the plot of this very battle was prepared.

Once again, let us turn to the sixth volume of the Soviet Military Encyclopedia. If you believe the article "Border Battles" and the map attached to it (do we have reason not to believe them, especially the map?), then a curious thing will turn out - this battle simply did not take place. There were scattered, uncoordinated attacks by Soviet mechanized corps, not united by either a single time or a single goal. In fact, most authors

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they write that each corps attacked on its own, but all this supposedly took place within the framework of a single plan. |

After fighting on the border, the Germans broke through between the Rava-Russky and Przemyssky fortified areas and began to advance to the southeast. Their XU motorized corps rushed to Lvov, and the [U army] rushed to Brody. The commander of the 6th Army, General Muzychenko, alarmed by this breakthrough, decided to counterattack Nemirov with the forces of the 4th Mechanized Corps, which had 979 tanks, including 456 T-34s and KVs. A terrible force, in no way inferior to the entire Kleist tank group. According to the map, the blow fell on the flank of the GU corps, that is, the infantry divisions. Again the oncoming battle of infantry and tanks, which always ended in the extermination of the infantry. Always, except for June 1941 ... So what did all this result in? In the bashful phrase of the historian: "As for the counterattack on Nemirov, it was not organized and did not improve the position of the 159th division." In addition, at the same time, the corps was distracted from carrying out the order of the front commander.

The situation to the north assumed a more dangerous character, where the main forces of Kleist were advancing - the III motorized and KhGUSH tank corps. They were advancing rapidly towards Rovno and Ostrov and needed to be stopped. The 4th and 15th mechanized corps received an order from General Kirponos on the morning of June 24 to strike at Radekhov. Alas, then began uniform chaos. General Muzychenko sends one of the divisions of the 4th mechanized corps to the left flank of his army, and on the streets of Lvov she collided with units of the 8th mechanized corps moving in the opposite direction. You know, it reminds me of the movie "Fanfan-Tulip". "We will move the right flank to the left, and the left flank to the right." But a hilarious comedy scene in real life turns into blood and death. According to the Germans, on June 24 units of the 4th mechanized corps attacked the anti-tank battalion of the 71st Infantry Division. In the ensuing battle, the Germans destroyed up to 50 Soviet tanks. Believe it or not?

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Probably, it is possible, but not unconditionally. The fact remains one thing - the Germans continued the offensive.

Next, we turn to the memoirs of Marshal Baghramyan:

"The second large tank group of fascists, which broke through to Radzechow, stumbled upon the advanced units of the 15th mechanized corps of General Karpezo that had approached here. The reader already knows with what difficulties the divisions of this corps, having found themselves without vehicles, made the march. Carpezo had to leave his 212th motorized division in Brody, moving on foot, ordering it to take up defense there in case of a breakthrough by enemy troops. Towards the enemy, Carpezo was able to throw only the 10th Panzer Division of General S.Ya. Ogurtsova. The fascist group consisted of about 350 tanks of new models. It would seem that,

what can one of our incomplete tank divisions do with them, which had armament mostly obsolete vehicles. But the Soviet tankers resolutely rushed into battle. The fighters of the tank and motorized rifle battalions, which made up the vanguard, fought with the greatest courage. They repulsed all attacks of the enemy. More than twenty burning enemy tanks and hundreds of corpses of fascist soldiers remained on the battlefield. That was the price the fascists paid for our six wrecked tanks."

Unfortunately, they did not reflect, but only briefly slowed down. In addition, the Luftwaffe intervened, which pretty much battered the columns of the 15th mechanized corps. In addition, there was one factor that undermined the combat effectiveness of our tank formations much more than all the German tanks and guns put together. We are talking about the disgusting technical condition of the machines and the extremely poor training of personnel. In 1943, during the Battle of Kursk, our tank brigades lost 15 percent or more of their tanks as they moved out of their concentration areas towards the front line. In the summer of 1941 this figure could only be higher, much higher. Therefore, it is not surprising that the mechanized corps during marches, which are quite short by German standards,

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literally melted before our eyes. The situation was further complicated by a flurry of conflicting orders, which threw divisions here and there.

The situation was exactly the same on the northern flank of the Kleist group, where Mackensen's 3rd motorized corps was advancing. Let's start with the actions of the 1st anti-tank brigade K.S., so beloved by historians. Moskalenko, who met the German 14th Panzer Division advancing on Lutsk. The operational report of the 5th Army joyfully reports that "in the period from 23 to 27 July, the 1st ITAB destroyed and knocked out about [50 enemy tanks." Well, of course, today no one believes in this, and they correctly write that there were only 147 tanks in the entire 14th Panzer Division. But if you say "a", you should also say "b". It is not difficult to find reports of the losses of this very division. Literally at hand, there are data for September 6, that is, they include another two months of fighting. And what are these losses? 27 tanks destroyed and 24 damaged. I repeat once again: the division lost so much in two and a half months of fighting. The question immediately arises: did "German tanks really have to gnaw through firing positions with heavy losses for three days"? I'm not talking about the fact that Lutsk is located about 100 kilometers from the border and the "gnawing" was going on at a speed of about 35 kilometers per day.

The attack of the 22nd mechanized corps ended with his disappearance. We will not say "extermination", because the Germans were almost not to blame for this. As in the south, his divisions shied from side to side. And if they attacked, then these attacks lacked coherence and unity. As the Germans coldly report, the attacks were carried out in small groups, and the 13th Panzer Division easily destroyed them one by one.

You can talk for a very long time about where that division went, and where this division went, but all this does not make much sense. Already from the brief descriptions given, it is clear that there was no tank battle near Brody - Lutsk - Dubno. Although our command had the opportunity to concentrate 6 me-

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khanized corps and a colossal number of tanks and with one powerful blow to defeat not only the army of Kleist, but also the 6th army of Reichenau, saving it from a difficult campaign to Stalingrad for its fate, the blow did not take place. `As in the case of the cavalry-mechanized group of General Boldin, there were separate pokes by the forces of the battalion or regiment, which the Germans easily repelled. Rotmistrov said this very clearly:

"The mechanized corps of the front entered this battle after 200-400 km of marches under the conditions of enemy air supremacy in the air. The introduction of these corps into battle was carried out without proper organization of the offensive, without reconnaissance of the enemy and the terrain. There was no air and proper artillery support. Therefore, the enemy had the opportunity to repel the attacks of our troops one by one, maneuvering part of his forces, and at the same time continue the offensive in uncovered directions.

However, if you wish, you can even find German sources that will confirm the opinion of the most tendentious historians of the Soviet period:

"The Russians nevertheless managed to hold back the advance of the German troops. They not only inflicted losses on the advancing troops and forced themselves to be respected, but also gained time. They could not be confused by the wedge-shaped breakthroughs of the tank groups. The Russians also suffered heavy losses, but they managed to withdraw their dense battle formations behind Sluch, the Upper Bug, and the Dniester. The first 10 days of the campaign have passed. After 10 days in France, German tanks, dispersing the cowardly French and British in front of them, covered 800 km and stood off the coast of the Atlantic. During the first 10 days of the "campaign to the East", only 100 km were covered in a straight line, and the shock tank groups of the German troops opposed the enemy, who was superior in strength and technical equipment, often resorting to unexplored effective tactics. This time the successful advance did not fit into the time schedule set by the command. After the first 10 days, the operational breakthrough in the southern sector has not yet been completed.

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Why Wolfgang Werten wrote such a thing in the history of the 16th Panzer Division, I do not presume to judge. One can only assume that he transferred the experience of the XU motorized corps to the entire Kleist group. But the fact is that the HEUSCH motorized corps traveled more than 200 kilometers during this time, and they did not fight particularly hard battles.

, Summary. The first days of the Great Patriotic War showed a complete professional unsuitability of the Soviet command staff. Border battles were not won by Kleist, Leeb and von Bock, they were lost by Kuznetsov, Pavlov, Kirponos. Much is said about Stalin's purges, which decapitated the army, but there is no certainty that if those people had remained in their posts, the result would have been different. The Germans were rapidly advancing along the entire front, and even in those areas where there were "heavy" battles, the speed of the Wehrmacht offensive was about 30 kilometers per day. Where there were none, the offensive turned into an ordinary peacetime march at a speed of up to 100 or more kilometers per day. But at the same time, only Army Group Center succeeded in the classic blitzkrieg, which ended with the encirclement of several armies in the Minsk region. In the south and north, the Germans were simply rapidly advancing deep into the territory of the USSR. However, the enemy's lack of forces and the grossest mistakes of the Germans in assessing the military potential of the USSR led to the fact that the operation "Barbarossa" failed literally in the first month. The Germans failed to "encircle and destroy the main Russian forces" west of the Dnieper. On the other hand, the "victorious fever" more and more resembled delirium tremens, which had an effect rather quickly.

Chapter 7 AUTUMN MARATHON

In the first month of the war against the Soviet Union, the Germans won many crushing victories. Almost all the armies deployed beyond the western border were defeated, huge trophies were captured, significant territories were occupied.

rii. However, few people realized that these victories laid the foundations for the future defeat of the Wehrmacht. Not only did intelligence, as they say, set up their own command of the armed forces in a big way, underestimating the military potential of the Soviet Union many times over, but in addition, the panzer generals themselves completely misunderstood the essence of what was happening. This is already 10 years after the end of the war in their memoirs, they began to say that they saw everything, warned and wanted ... Lies! If they saw anything, they failed to understand what exactly they saw, and it would be better for them to keep silent about "warning" and "wanting".

Around the middle of July 1941, it was time to sum up the first results of military operations on the Eastern Front. The extent of the Germans' delusion is best characterized by an entry in General Halder's diary dated 4 July:

"In general, it should be considered that the enemy no longer has sufficient forces for a serious defense of his new line, passing from the former Russian-Estonian border along the Western Dvina and Dnieper and further south. This is evidenced by a Russian order, intercepted yesterday, transmitted over the radio, that only separate groups should be stationed at the crossings on the Western Dvina. In the course of the advance of our armies, all attempts at resistance by the enemy will obviously be quickly broken. Then the question of the capture of Leningrad and Moscow will come up before us. It is necessary to wait whether Stalin's appeal, in which he called on all working people for a people's war against us, will succeed. This will determine what measures and forces will have to clean up the vast industrial areas that we have to occupy. The main thing now is to deprive the enemy of the opportunity to use these areas.

Apparently, this delusion was shared and the rest presented the German high command, because it was decided to actually go to the phase of the pursuit of the enemy. The same Halder: "On the front of the Army Group Center, it is possible to ensure the advancement of tank units up to Moscow, and the infantry beyond the Western Dvina and

Dnieper". The Chief of the General Staff of the Ground Forces looked at the situation too optimistically, because less than a week later, near Orsha and Mogilev, Guderian and Goth encountered fresh second-echelon armies. This probably came as a shock to Guderian, because 341,000 prisoners were taken in the Minsk pocket, 4,799 tanks, 9,427 guns, and 1,777 aircraft were captured and destroyed.

By the way, another entry by Halder for the same day, quite closely related to the blitzkrieg. For some reason, our historians like to quote it only partially.

"General Thomas reported on the impressions received during the trip to the front of the 3rd Panzer Group:

A. Fight against giant enemy tanks. The 105 mm cannon and the 50 mm anti-tank gun are effective against them.

b. The T-1 tanks are a burden for the units, and they should be sent to the rear for internal protection on the domestic territory, protection of the coast, and also for the purpose of combat training."

With us, as you can easily see, point "b" is very popular, which is absolutely right. The unfortunate tankette had previously caused a lot of trouble to the division commanders, where it was stuffed, and on the Eastern Front it turned directly into hard labor shackles. But for some reason, they don't like to remember about point "a". But it directly follows from it that the Germans considered our KV tanks not such a terrible threat. Yes, it's annoying, but nothing more. And reliable means of dealing with them have already been found. Therefore, it appears that

stories about the mystical horror that the Germans experienced only when they saw the KV, are more like to fairy tales.

The flywheel of the blitzkrieg was spun to the limit, and the owners themselves could not stop the wheel without risking their own lives. Therefore, the Berlin mechanics preferred not to hear the nasty rattle on the axle and not to see that the wheel began to beat little by little from side to side. On the other hand, if the front-line officers had any illusions about the prospects for a further offensive, they

fanned very quickly. In any case, Guderian writes that near Orsha he encountered unexpectedly strong Russian resistance. But there was nowhere to go, and on July 10 an offensive began on Smolensk. Guderian struck with the forces of the XXX Motorized Corps in the direction of Dukhovshchina, bypassing Smolensk from the north. At the same time, Guderian's 2nd Panzer Group launched an offensive from the south, crossing the Dnieper on both sides of Mogilev. They managed to encircle 4 divisions of the [3rd Army] forces, which, although they continued to fight in the encirclement for another 2 weeks, did not manage to slow down the advance of the German tanks. By the way, during the heroic defense of Mogilev, the Germans began to call it "Russian Madrid", as they still remembered the events of the Civil War in Spain. This, too, was a serious sign that the panzer generals overlooked, though not without reason.

Kurt Lemelsen's motorized corps, advancing north of Mogilev, moved straight to Smolensk. After the battle near Krasnoe, already on July 16, the 29th motorized division broke into the city. It was followed by the 17th Panzer Division. Somehow it suddenly turned out that there was no one to defend the city, because two divisions of the 16th Army of General Lukin were thrown towards the advancing Germans. The city had to be defended by the 129th rifle division, which was part of the 19th army, but lost contact with its headquarters, later two more divisions from the same army approached. But it didn't help much. As usual, threatening orders are issued in such cases. On July 17, Marshal Timoshenko growled at his subordinates:

"The State Defense Committee noted with its special order that the command staff of the units of the Western Front is imbued with evacuation moods and easily relates to the issue of the withdrawal of troops from Smolensk and the surrender of Smolensk to the enemy. If these sentiments are true, then the State Defense Committee considers such sentiments among the command staff a crime bordering on outright treason. The Defense Committee ordered to stop with an iron fist such

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sentiments discrediting the banner of the Red Army. Under no circumstances should the city of Smolensk be handed over to the enemy.

But it helped a little, as, indeed, and any other pieces of paper. By the morning of July 19, the city was occupied by the Germans.

At the same time, it should be noted that both commanders of the tank groups took a terrible risk, since their flanks were open. Guderian's group stretched their positions on too long a front. The Soviet command could take advantage of this and tried, inflicting a counterattack near Senno on July 4 by the forces of the 5th and 7th mechanized corps. However, after the first success, when the German 7th Panzer Division was driven back, the Germans pulled significant forces there and repulsed the attack. At the same time, as always, the Soviet mechanized corps lost up to 30% of their tanks on the march.

At this point, the OKH came to our aid. The Berlin strategists, whose eyes began to widen from the abundance of tempting targets, suddenly decided to defeat the units of the 22nd and 29th armies, which occupied positions at the junction between Army Groups Center and North. To do this, it took away a tank corps from Hoth's EUP and ordered it to advance north in the direction of Velikiye Luki. The city was even occupied on July 20, but the Germans were immediately knocked out of it. As a result, during the most intense period of fighting, Hoth lost one of the two tank corps. It should also be remembered that the tension of the fighting has already begun to affect the German units. Continuous victories too

they were expensive, for example, 35% of tanks remained in the 3rd Panzer Division, and with reinforcements it was very bad.

And yet, the sharply weakened Goth group broke through the front, and the 7th Panzer Division moved to Dukhovshchina. Literally at the very last moment, the Germans managed to transfer three infantry corps of the 9th Army to Vitebsk, otherwise the position of Hoth would have become simply catastrophic. So at least he had a rear. The 7th Panzer continued its offensive, and on July 13 it was separated from Guderian's 29th Motorized Division by only about 40 kilometers.

Guderian did not have this rear at some point. On July 13, the Soviet 63rd Rifle Corps counterattacked

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in the direction of Bobruisk, cutting off the southern flank of the 2nd Panzer Group. Our troops crossed the Dnieper and occupied Zhlobin and Rogachev. The 66th Rifle Corps, advancing to the south, advanced 80 kilometers to the west, reaching the crossings across the Berezina. With a normal organization, this counteroffensive would have put Guderian not on the brink, but on the brink of disaster. But our rifle divisions were not reinforced with tanks, and the German command managed to transfer reserves, stopping the offensive. On July 22, the offensive was resumed with the aim of deblocking the Mogilev garrison. But now the successes were quite insignificant, since the German 2nd Army was deployed in this area. Among other things, this counterattack led to the fact that a little later the forces of Army Group Center were turned to the south, which ended with the Kyiv pocket.

On July 16, units of the vanguard of the 7th Panzer and 29th Motorized Divisions met, although even the Germans themselves believe that they finally completed the encirclement of the 16th and 20th armies only on July 26th. However, Field Marshal von Bock in his diaries pointed out that even after that there was a gap in the area of Yartsevo and Solovyovo, and the Germans themselves admit that a significant part of the encircled slipped out of the cauldron. Here, unfortunately, we have to once again note the utter helplessness of the Soviet command. The encirclement ring was closed purely symbolically, the positions of the HEUP motorized corps of Guderian's army were especially weak. He stretched out a long small intestine, which was probably not too difficult to cut. In the northern part of the ring was the 7th Panzer Division, which by this time had already lost more than half of the available tanks. |

The headquarters decided to try to save the encircled armies, and an operation was planned to break through the ring. However, the plan was drawn up extremely unsuccessful; Again, some scattered pokes were made from different sides. 21] July created five operational groups, using the troops of the 29th, 30th, 24th and 28th new armies of the Reserve Front. It was supposed

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deliver concentric strikes in the direction of Smolensk:

- task force I.I. Maslennikova (3 rifle divisions) was to advance in the direction of Velizh;
- task forces V.A. Khomenko (3 rifle and 2 cavalry divisions) and Lieutenant General S.A. Kalinin (3 rifle divisions) from the northeast;
- task force K.K. Rokossovsky (2 rifle and | tank divisions) - from the east;
- task force V.Ya. Kachalov (2 rifle and | tank divisions) - from the southeast (from the side of Roslavl).

The direct leadership of the operational groups was entrusted to Lieutenant General A.I. Eremenko (since July 19, commander of the Western Front). |

At the same time, on the southern flank of the Western Front, the 21st Army received the task of resuming the offensive in order to defeat the Bobruisk-Bykhov grouping of the enemy and restore contact with the besieged Mogilev (06 we already mentioned this), and the 13th Army was to continue attacks on Krichev and Propoisk.

From the strip of the 21st Army, a cavalry group consisting of 3 cavalry divisions was sent to the rear of the enemy's Mogilev-Smolensk grouping. I would like to see if the Germans would have managed to fight back if these forces had been reduced to two groups, no more.

As a result, everything ended, as they say, dearer to yourself. Not only did they fail to break through the corridor to the encircled armies and liberate the Mogilev garrison, in addition, Kachalov's group got into the encirclement. On August 5, von Bock reported on the end of the battle for Smolensk. According to the Germans, they captured 302,000 prisoners, destroyed and captured 3,205 tanks, 3,120 guns, 1,098 aircraft.

At this point, the course of events changed dramatically. I have already written and do not renounce my words: the Germans simply did not have enough strength to successfully conduct a blitzkrieg along the entire length of the Eastern Front, which they stubbornly tried to do. But Hitler's subsequent decisions directly confirmed this. And again, I do not go back on my words that Germany is not

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had a chance of winning the war with the Soviet Union. But the decisions taken at the beginning of August deprived the Germans of even the shadow of a chance. The fact is that on August 4, Hitler flew to the headquarters of Army Group Center. There he confirmed his earlier decision to send the 2nd Panzer Group north to Leningrad and the 3rd south to Kiev. True, he allowed von Bock a limited offensive in the Yelnya region, since he believed that the Russians did not have any serious forces left to defend Moscow. Even in their nightmares, the Germans could not foresee that a third strategic echelon would appear at the front after the second strategic echelon. In the war against Poland, the mistakes of strategic intelligence got away with the Germans. In the war against England, they have already turned into serious troubles. In the war against the Soviet Union, the blindness of the Abwehr led to disaster.

And yet, Hitler's decision is in no way understandable - if von Bock had continued the offensive with the forces of the tank groups of Hoth and Guderian, despite all their losses, there would have been certain chances. The arguments of some "cult historians" about the strategic shadow of the southern fronts covering the troops marching on Moscow are pure scholasticism. Unfortunately, the Soviet troops (and the generals in particular) had repeatedly shown their complete inability to conduct offensive operations, so nothing threatened von Bock from the south. On the other hand, our army conducted the defense more and more stubbornly and skillfully.

It is only now that the German generals have fully appreciated the extent and depth of the new theater of operations. And right there, disputes broke out in the high command - what to do next. On August 7, OKH Chiefs of Staff Halder and OKW Joll met to discuss future plans. General Warlimont, not without malice, remarks that such a meeting was held for the first time. It took the generals three days to work out a unified point of view—it was necessary to advance on Moscow. 18 August The OKH prepares a memorandum for the commander of the ground forces, von Brauchitsch. It explicitly states that the remaining

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forces will be enough for an offensive in only one direction, and this direction should be Moscow. However, the German generals did not have the courage to work together to dissuade Hitler. The only one with the bad temper to protest was again Guderian, who claimed that his divisions were too exhausted to push south. However, since

You can't argue much with the Fuhrer, and on August 21, Hitler makes the final decision - to send tanks to the south to the north, and not to Moscow. He stated that this was not a new decision at all, and indeed, he announced this for the first time on July 8.

"I have already stated this quite clearly and unequivocally from the very beginning of the operation. The main task to be solved before the start of winter is not the capture of Moscow, but the occupation of the Crimea in the south, as well as the industrial and coal basin on the Donets".

This addendum to Directive No. 34 was presented to von Brauchitsch for review by the commanders of the army groups. We can firmly state: on August 21, the blitzkrieg on the Eastern Front ended. The Germans still succeeded in several blitz operations, which ended very successfully, but now they lost the war completely and irrevocably.

On July 27, the reshaping of the command of Army Group Center began, taking into account the upcoming operations. Nearly all of Hoth's panzer divisions were taken from him, handed over to Army Group North, and as a consolation they hung the 9th Army around his neck, as its commander, General Strauss, fell ill. The 2nd tank group was renamed the army group "Guderian" and they drove to the south. He had to take his soul. The impetuous Heinz personally led the X Army Corps transferred to him from the 4th Army and in the Roslavl region connected with the XU motorized corps of von Schweppenburg, surrounding parts of the Soviet 28th Army. After that, Guderian's army moved south. The 2nd Army of von Weichs was supposed to interact with it, but he advanced on Gomel very slowly. Guderian had already managed to cut off the escape route for the remnants of the Central Front when von Weichs reached Goma.

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la. The XX MU and KHEUP motorized corps continued to move further south, and there were no Red Army forces in front of them. On August 30, Stalin ordered Yeremenko's Bryansk Front to liquidate the breakthrough, but this order remained a good wish. The general writes with great resentment:

"Enemy attacks were still of a pronounced adventuristic nature. Having broken through in some sector of the front, the Nazis tried by all means to create the appearance of a complete encirclement of our units. Motorcyclists and tanks rushing along the roads fired indiscriminately. Behind the tanks, as a rule, in vehicles, the infantry moved. The war in this area was on the roads and along the roads. The enemy avoided forests and swamps. Motorcyclists and tanks "combed" the forests lying in their way with fire, without causing significant damage to our units with this fire.

It is only unclear what prevented Eremenko from stopping this adventurism, because Guderian's troops advanced almost 300 kilometers south, seizing bridgeheads on the Seim River. Despite this, Eremenko, without blushing, tells how Guderian disgraced himself:

"Further on, Guderian tells in some detail how he, frightened by our active opposition, hastily requested reinforcements. |

These insistent demands for help, regarded by the Hitlerite headquarters as panic, as well as the failure of the offensive on GTrubchevsk, brought Guderian a lot of trouble, the ion could not remember them without bitterness and shame.

Guderian didn't get any reinforcements, they didn't even give him his own HYOUJ! motorized corps, but he calmly continued to move south, not particularly noticing the efforts of Eremenko. As before, the attacks were carried out piecemeal, and the Germans beat them off without difficulty. In general, this throw of Guderian's group to the south is very reminiscent of his own throw to the English Channel in May 1940. The consequences for the troops in front of him were just as disastrous, but he did not bring strategic success. I understand that this sounds strange. The whole environment

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th front - and not a strategic success, how is it? Well, the Germans pushed back the front by 500 kilometers, so this is fatal for France, and not for Russia. Well, our troops lost another 600,000 people, and this did not become a fatal blow for the Soviet Union. Now, if Guderian had managed to destroy the British Expeditionary Force near Dunkirk, even though it had about 200,000 soldiers, then the course of the war could well change dramatically. And, despite all the successes of the Germans, the flywheel of the blitzkrieg was already grinding with might and main and wobbled, barely holding on to the axle.

The offensive of the Army Group "South" developed slowly compared to the northern and central sectors of the front. First of all, Field Marshal Rundstedt was held like an anchor by the army group "Antonescu" (yes, the same one), which leaned on the flank on the Black Sea coast. The Soviet troops acted unsuccessfully, but the Romanians did nothing at all. As a result, Army Group South turned into something like a huge beam, fixed at one end and rotating around it. After the breakthrough of the 1st Panzer Group, our Southwestern Front was cut into two parts, but both the northern grouping near Korosten and the southern one offered the most stubborn resistance to the Germans. The Germans managed to cut off parts of 5 Soviet corps in the Uman region, which was a serious, but not decisive blow. By the end of August, the Germans reached the Dnieper on a large stretch and ran into it tightly. The cautious behavior of von Rundstedt is understandable: German intelligence once again deceived their general. According to her estimates, General Kirponos had 73 infantry, 16 tank and 5 cavalry divisions, although in fact half as many. But an attempt to force a river as wide as the Dnieper, with such superiority of the enemy, could easily end in disaster, and von Rundstedt reasonably decided not to risk it. In aviation, the Red Army also maintained superiority in this sector of the front. In early August, Kirponos firmly promises Stalin to keep Kyiv, which at this moment sounds quite reasonable.

But then the Headquarters intervened, creating a certain structure under the

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the title of "South-West Direction" and putting Marshal Budyonny at the head of it. He was supposed to coordinate the actions of the Southern and Southwestern Fronts. Budyonny immediately began to order. All reinforcements from the Kharkov region were hastily transferred directly to Kyiv instead of strengthening the flanks. Not even a German agent could do more harm. |

The 3rd Panzer Corps was the first to reach Kyiv, but General von Mackensen did not dare to launch a frontal assault. Soon parts of the Kleist Panzer Group were transferred to other sectors of the front, and the XXX Corps took their place. On July 30, the Germans launched the first assault, but were easily repulsed. The next attack was made on August 8, and it was also repulsed with heavy losses. Veterans began to recall with horror the positional meat grinder of Verdun. On the northern face of the ledge is the Soviet 5th Army of General Potapov, which also successfully repulsed the attacks of von Reichenau's 6th Army.

Despite all this, starting from mid-August, General Kirponos repeatedly requested that Potapov's army be withdrawn, and on August 23 it leaves for the Dnieper. But then General Potapov made a gross mistake, his troops did not destroy the important wooden bridge in Gornostaipol, and the Germans broke through after them. These undestroyed bridges became a real curse for the Red Army. For some unknown reason, neither in the first days of the war, nor two months after it began along the entire front, from the Baltic Sea to the Black Sea, here and there the bridges fell into the hands of the Germans completely intact. Kirponos ordered his aircraft to destroy the bridge at any cost. The Il-2 attack aircraft managed to set fire to it, and as a result, the III hull was cut off. But Kirponos failed to take advantage of this. The situation of the Soviet troops in the Kyiv region continued to deteriorate.

Meanwhile, Guderian's tanks continued to roll south, although there were not so many of them left. In the entire army group "Guderian" there were no more than 200 tanks. It is often written that the blitzkrieg formula is "Panzer" plus "Shtu

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ka", but Guderian's number of "panzers" was noticeably reduced, and there were no "Stukas" at all. His offensive was supported by the 3rd and 53rd bomber squadrons, the 210th squadron of high-speed bombers (Me-110) and the 51st fighter squadron. In order to stop him, the 40th Army of General Podlas was formed. However, on August 24, General Model's 3rd Panzer Division captured the bridge over the Desna in Novgorod-Seversky with a swift blow, although only 41 tanks remained in it instead of 198 in the state. Oh those bridges! Attempts to drive the Germans out of the bridgehead, as well as attempts to strike at the rear of von Schweppenburg's corps, yielded nothing. In addition, the 2nd Army of von Weichs was finally reeling, which went on the offensive and pushed back the Soviet 21st Army, which had orders to attack Guderian's western flank, towards Kiev. Eremenko's attempts to slow down the advance of the "scoundrel Guderian" failed, no matter what he wrote later. On September 3, the gap between the Bryansk and Southwestern fronts was about 30 kilometers; by September 10, it had increased to almost 100 kilometers. Parts of the KhKhPU motorized corps stretched for 230 kilometers, but the Soviet units were not able to cut even this small intestine. Worse, this battered division crushed the 40th army of General Podlas and captured Romny. Positively, the Soviet generals simply had no idea what to do in the rapidly changing environment of modern mobile warfare, and looked simply helpless. |

The threat to the Southwestern Front became quite obvious, and on September 1, General Kirponos requested permission to withdraw troops from the Dnieper to the line of the Psel River. Stalin refused and appointed Marshal Timoshenko as commander of the South-Western direction instead of Budyonny. But these permutations no longer played any role.

In the meantime, the events on the southern face of the Kyiv salient also took on an increasingly sinister character. On August 19, von Kleist's 9th Panzer Division crossed the river to Zaporozhye, but was driven out of the bridgehead. On August 20, units of the 17th Army captured the bridgehead in Kremenchug, and

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On August 25, the 13th Panzer Division captured an important bridge (again!!!) in Dnepropetrovsk. During the week, the Germans entrenched themselves on the bridgehead, repulsing the attacks of the Soviet troops. block the foothold

the hastily created 38th Army was supposed to, which did not cope with its task. However, it was difficult to expect this, since all fresh reserves were sent to the northern front.

Somewhat unexpectedly, von Kleist showed flashes of military talent: he managed to deceive his opponent, General Feklenko. Leaving the 3rd motorized corps with reinforcements to defend the bridge in Dnepropetrovsk, he transferred the KhGUSH motorized corps to the bridgehead of the 17th Army in Kremenchug. Note that by this time Kleist had 331 tanks left, only 533% of those available on June 22. But that was enough for the Germans. On September 12, a sudden blow was dealt, the front was broken through. The 16th and 9th Panzer Divisions rushed forward, covering more than 70 kilometers in 12 hours. It was no longer a blitzkrieg, but a super blitzkrieg ... The 2nd battalion of the 2nd tank regiment defeated the headquarters of the 38th army, General Feklenko escaped by jumping out the window. Leaving the 7th Army to cover the flanks, the 1st Panzer Group rushed to meet Guderian.

The threat of annihilation loomed over the entire Southwestern Front, but the command did not dare to do anything. The resistance of our troops intensified, it took Model's division 2 days to capture Romny, but they still failed to stop the German offensive. On September 13, Model made a throw of 50 kilometers and went to Lohvitsa, where he was supposed to meet with Hube's 16th Panzer Division. Officially, the Kiev cauldron was shut down on September 14 at 18.20. And on the same day, Marshal Shaposhnikov reminded the command of the Southwestern Front that it must obey the order of Comrade Stalin and stubbornly defend itself. Of course, it is easy to blame everything on Stalin and say that the dictator, they say, did not understand the nature of modern operations and did not keep up with the "lightning cry". But boilers in Minsk, Smolensk and Uman

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organized not by Stalin, but by his generals, so they showed themselves no better.

Marshal Timoshenko made a Byzantine attempt to save the day. He sent Colonel Baghramyan by plane to Kirponos with a verbal order to start a retreat. However, Kirponos, knowing the Soviet realities perfectly, demanded a written order. While the altercations were going on, while the necessary paper was being prepared, several days were lost. It is simply impossible to imagine that Kirponos allowed himself defiance in the style of Guderian, examples of which we have repeatedly cited. However, although no one shot Guderian for his antics, one of the most talented German generals did not receive the title of field marshal either.

The necessary permission came to Kirponos only on the night of September 17-18, and even then it spoke of leaving Kiev, but not of leaving the encirclement. But all this was already useless. By this time, 5 encircled armies simply fell apart, as happened in the Minsk pocket. The Germans delivered several auxiliary blows, cut the boiler into pieces, and that was it. An attempt to break through the encirclement from the outside ended in failure. The hastily created cavalry mechanized group of General Belov diligently repeated all the mistakes made earlier, literally not missing a single one. Dry chronicle: on September 17, the 2nd cavalry corps attacks, on September 18, the 129th tank brigade, on September 20, the 1st tank brigade, on September 22, the 100th rifle division. Even exhausted German divisions were enough to repel such attacks.

The fighting in the pocket ended on 26 September. The Germans captured 665,212 prisoners, 884 tanks, 3,436 guns. Another amazing blitz operation. Please note that it took the Germans about three weeks, no more than all this. The flywheel spun with renewed vigor, but then the rusted and worn axle could not stand it. The huge wheel

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torn and with a howl went to destroy everything around. First. hit by the Panzerwaffe.

If we switch to the language of dry prose, it turns out that the Germans won a stunning military victory without solving any of the tasks set. The capture of the Donetsk coal and industrial region was important not in itself, but only in the context of undermining the economic potential of the USSR. But this potential, although it received a terrible blow, was not undermined. Moreover, already in the summer of 1941, a large-scale evacuation of industrial enterprises to the east began. The significance of this operation, it seems to me, has not yet been fully appreciated. From my point of view, its contribution to the final victory is no less than that of the Battle of Stalingrad or Kursk. Another interesting nuance. The Germans failed to use the industrial potential of the Donetsk Basin on a serious scale. If the Skoda factories regularly supplied the Wehrmacht with tanks and guns, then no one heard anything about the "tigers" produced by KhtZ.

In September, the German command once again believed that victory over the Soviet Union was close. The Red Army suffered colossal losses, the Wehrmacht approached Leningrad, operations in the south also developed successfully. On September 6, Hitler signs Directive No. 35, ordering the creation of flank groups to conduct defensive operations and repel the advance of Timoshenko's armies. Hitler ordered von Bock to start the offensive as soon as possible, without asking the stupid question: what kind of forces would the Army Group Center, having lost all its tank corps, actually attack with?

However, on September 16, von Bock nevertheless signed the plan for Operation Gaifun, in which three tank groups were to participate. The fact is that the OKH promised to transfer to him the Göppner group (3 tank, 2 motorized, 2 infantry divisions) and return Guderian from the south as soon as the operation near Kiev was completed. As in the last offensive, von Bock decided to double the panzer groups with conventional armies, thus creating no

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some gigantic "fighting groups". As usual, disputes and squabbles immediately began. Von Bock intended to hold a deep bypass of Vyazma, while the OKH proposed a not so deep operation. After the liquidation of the next boilers (and none of the German generals doubted that everything would go quickly and smoothly), Halder proposed to send motorized divisions directly to Moscow. But Hitler suddenly showed glimpses of a sober mind and declared that he did not want to fight in a large city. Similarly, he did not want fighting on the streets of Leningrad and Kyiv. The proposal to coordinate this offensive with the strike of the 16th Army of von Leeb to Lake Ilmen and the armies of von Rundstedt to Kharkov, von Bock also accepted without enthusiasm.

For about a month, the central section of the front remained static. During this time, German front-line intelligence quite accurately identified the forces opposing von Bock, identifying 80 of the 83 Soviet rifle divisions. However, the Abwehr continued to feed the top leadership with fairy tales, which partly explained the immoderate optimism of the OKW and OKhK, who believed that only 54 Soviet divisions were there. Supply problems were not fully resolved. The tank divisions were pretty battered by battles and transitions, Guderian's tank group after being thrown to the south had no more than 50% of the regular strength, Gotha's group - no more than 70%, only at Göppner everything was more or less normal. |

On September 24, a staff game took place according to the Typhoon plan, which, as the Germans hoped, would be the last blitz operation of this war. Von Brauchitsch, Halder, Kesselring, that is, almost all of the German high military command, participated in it. The main blow was planned to be carried out by the forces of the 4th Army and the 4th Panzer Group, advancing in the center. Data on the forces of the participants is extremely contradictory. Some sources claim that the Germans had a double superiority in almost all indicators, others claim almost equality. True, no one talks about the superiority of the Soviet troops. Therefore, we will refrain from giving figures, confining ourselves to the remark

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that von Bock's troops were opposed by the Western, Bryansk, Kalinin and Reserve fronts.

However, when organizing the defense, the Soviet command made a number of mistakes. First of all, time was wasted. After the center of gravity of German operations shifted to the south, for some reason it was concluded that this year there would be no attack on Moscow, so preparations were carried out rather sluggishly. Headquarters did not have a documented plan for conducting a defensive operation in the Moscow direction, there was only a plan for organizing defense. Yes, and it was formed in stages, but was implemented in an administrative order. The headquarters intended, relying on defense in depth, to prevent the Germans from breaking through to the capital. The main efforts were supposed to be concentrated on the shortest routes to the city from the west: along the Smolensk-Moscow and Roslavl-Moscow roads. The creation of the first stage of defensive structures was planned to be completed by October 15, and the second - by November 20-25. By the end of September, the readiness of the frontiers and defense lines of Moscow did not exceed 40-50% of the planned scope of work.

On September 10, the Stavka demanded that the Western Front "dig firmly into the ground and, at the expense of secondary directions and strong defenses, withdraw six to seven divisions to the reserve in order to create a powerful maneuverable group for an offensive in the future." At the same time, the engineering equipment of the area was improved. Toward the end of September, the headquarters began to receive more and more intelligence about the preparation by the Germans of a major offensive; The situation called for immediate action. Finally, on September 27, the commanders of the Western and Bryansk fronts received a directive from the Headquarters:

"Due to the fact that, as it turned out during the battles with the enemy, our troops are not yet ready for serious offensive operations, the Headquarters of the Supreme High Command orders:

1. On all sectors of the front, go over to a tough, stubborn defense, while conducting active reconnaissance of the enemy and only if necessary, undertaking private attacks

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firing operations to improve their defensive positions ...

2. The directions to Rzhev, Vyazma, Bryansk, Sevsk, Kursk and the junctions with neighboring fronts should be especially well covered in terms of engineering and firepower.

Further, the directive demanded that the troops "arrange on the entire front trenches of a full profile in several lines with communication passages, barbed wire and anti-tank obstacles." A side note: how many monstrous defeats in terms of scale were required to move from the ill-fated rifle cells to full-profile trenches.

The Stavka did not guess the enemy's plan in the Moscow direction: the areas of concentration of the main efforts of the fronts turned out to be away from the directions of the enemy's main attacks.

The German offensive began on September 30 at 06.35 with an attack by Guderian's tank group, who begged for permission to launch the attack two days earlier than the others. He delivered a sudden blow in the Glukhov area at the junction between the 13th Army and the Ermakov group. By the way, "Swift Heinz" did not change his habits and led the offensive from the forward command post in Glukhov, that is, in fact, from the front line. The defense of the Soviet troops was broken through, and Yermakov's counterattack, undertaken the next day, was easily repelled. Since silence reigned in the rest of the front, the commander of the Bryansk Front, General Eremenko, decided that this was just a distraction. Nevertheless, it was decided to transfer part of the reserves to the breakthrough site.

Literally the next day after the start of the offensive, the 3rd Panzer Division occupied Sevsk, and the XU Motorized Corps rushed further to Orel - Mtsensk - Tula. And the Soviet command was still expecting the main blow in the Bryansk area and kept the main reserves of the front there, calmly looking at the moving German tank columns. KhTUP motorized corps after the breakthrough turned sharply to the north in the direction of Bryansk, surrounding the 13th and 3rd armies. On the-

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The line of the Front from the date of October 1st: .

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Operation Typhoon

he was hit by the [III Corps of the 2nd Army of von Weichs. Two armies were in the ring. General Eremenko was once again unable to control the situation, and the offensive developed unhindered. In the afternoon, the 6th company of the 35th Tank Regiment of the 4th Tank Division broke into Oryol, and trams ran peacefully on the streets of the city. For 4 days of the offensive, this division covered 240 kilometers, which does not fit well with stories of stubborn resistance.

On October 2, the 9th and 4th armies went on the offensive. The resistance of the soldiers of the Red Army was fierce, often turning into hand-to-hand combat, but short-lived. The guns of Goth and Göppner entered the breakthroughs, and the defense at the turn of the Desna River collapsed. Taking advantage of Göppner's success, the 2nd Army went to the rear of the Bryansk Front, and another pocket was outlined - now to the north of Bryansk.

The Bryansk Front died in two boilers. On October 17, the 50th Army, surrounded north of Bryansk, was destroyed, and on October 20, a pocket was destroyed south of Bryansk, where the 3rd and 13th armies were located. Eremenko himself was very lucky, because on October 13 he was wounded and was taken by plane to the rear. He didn't deserve this. However, even dying, the front rendered an invaluable service to the defenders of Moscow. As we can see, the liquidation of the boilers dragged on, stealing three whole weeks from the Germans, at a time when literally every day was dear to them. In addition, a significant part of the personnel of the encircled armies still managed to break out, although all heavy equipment was lost. By the way, Guderian should be thanked for this. Once again, he preferred the development of the offensive to the creation of a reliable encirclement ring. The main thing was that once again the German tanks broke away from the infantry, which soon led to sad

consequences.

However, not everything went smoothly for the Germans. Quite unexpectedly, the commander of the 4th Army, Kluge, began to interfere in the actions of Göppner, who was already in the rear of the Bryansk Front. The main forces of the 4th Panzer Group were rapidly rolling towards Yuhnov, but Kluge

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Hall HEMG motorized corps to turn to the north, tempted by the opportunity to arrange one more boiler in the Vyazma region. Problems with the work of the railways began to affect. The Panzer Group Gotha, having broken through the front, simply stood up on October 4, as it ran out of fuel. The commander of the Western Front, General Konev, used this pause to try to save the troops, and he obtained such an order from the Headquarters. Well, the decision of the OKH to change the commander in the midst of the offensive looks completely unexpected. General Hoth received the 17th Army in Army Group South, and Oberst General Reinhardt took his place. These were already completely unforeseen zigzags of the enraged flywheel.

And then a very interesting story begins around the 4th Panzer Division, advancing on Mtsensk. So, on the morning of October 6, the division left Orel and immediately ran into an ambush set up by General Lelyushenko's 1st Guards Rifle Corps. However, it also included two tank brigades. In the ensuing battle, the German division lost over 30 tanks. Soon, near the village of Perviy Voin, just south of Mtsensk, a new battle followed, in which another 43 German tanks were destroyed. All this was created by the 4th Tank Brigade of Colonel Katukov. The following is a quotation from Guderian, which we will not comment on for now:

"At the same time, in the area of operations of the 24th Panzer Corps near Mtsensk, northeast of Orel, fierce local battles unfolded, into which the 4th Panzer Division was involved, but due to mudslides, it could not receive sufficient support. A large number of Russian T-34 tanks were thrown into the battle, causing heavy losses to our tanks. The superiority of the material part of our tank forces, which has taken place so far; was henceforth lost and now passed to the enemy. Thus, the prospects for fast and

continuous success. I wrote about this new situation for us in my report to the command of the army group, in which I described in detail the advantage of the T-34 tank in comparison with

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our T-[U] tank, pointing out the need to change the design of our tanks in the future."

However, the division of General Langerman continued to move forward, but on October 11 near Mtsensk suffered a new defeat. The Katukov brigade alone destroyed (according to Soviet data) 133 tanks and 49 guns, stopping the Germans on the outskirts of the city.

Now, we're going to start asking questions. First, a question to Heinz Guderian. What does the phrase "The superiority of the material part of our tank forces, which has taken place so far, has now been lost and has now passed to the enemy" mean? After all, the Germans encountered T-34 tanks right on the border, but for some reason then they did not consider them "materially superior" and fought them more or less successfully. What's happened? Maybe, as the children's poet wrote, "however, during the journey, the dog could grow up"? Or is it just "Swift Gainey" looking for excuses for his failures?

This is followed by a question to Colonel Katukov. It is known that by the beginning of Operation Gaifun, the German 4th Panzer Division had about 100 tanks. Only 59 tanks left Orel for Mtsensk. Of the remaining 40, only 6 were destroyed, the rest were repaired after breakdowns and damage. But how to destroy 133 out of 59 tanks? And how to link Katukov's peppy reports with the report of General Langerman, who reported the loss of 10 people killed and 33 wounded in the battle near Mtsensk, 6 tanks destroyed and 4 damaged, 2 - 88-mm anti-aircraft guns and 2 - 105-mm guns? For some reason, the Germans are still convinced that they won the first day of the battle for Mtsensk. This was followed by an operational pause (so the Germans say) or 7 days of fierce fighting (so our sources say). On October 11, the Germans still managed to take Mtsensk, but they were unable to move further to the east.

Guderian claims that the heavy rains began further, and his tanks simply could not budge. Probably lying... The Luftwaffe also reduced the number of sorties from 800 per day (October 6) to 139 (October 9), also referring to non-flying weather. All in all,

no matter by

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for some reason, but Guderian's tanks (he, apparently, also does not write the whole truth) got stuck near Mtsensk until October 22.

Meanwhile, thunder struck near Vyazma. Goepner's 4th Panzer Group began to move rapidly towards Yukhnov and Maloyaroslavets. He turned one of the buildings to the north to go to Vyazma. There he met with the tanks of General Göppner advancing from the north. Another cauldron appeared on the map, containing units of the 19th, 20th, 24th and 32nd armies. However, even in this case, more than 80,000 soldiers escaped from the boiler. These boilers of the fall of 1941 were already fundamentally different from the summer ones. And the Germans had to carry them much longer. In general, although von Bock managed to defeat the armies covering Moscow in the first phase of Operation Typhoon, he failed to destroy them. Guderian writes with exceptional accuracy:

"Having successfully completed the battles in the areas of Bryansk and Vyazma, Army Group Center has thus achieved another major tactical success. The question of whether she is able to continue the offensive in order to turn this tactical success into an operational one has been the most important question that has confronted the high command of the German army since the outbreak of the war.

However, the answer is already visible in his question. Von Bock loudly announced that he had captured 673,098 prisoners in cauldrons, 1,277 tanks, and 4,378 guns. Apparently, in order to get a round and beautiful figure - a million - another 332,000 soldiers were declared dead. However, having won the battle, he lost time and lost the war. New armies rose in front of the German front. Maybe,

The English historian Liddell Hart was right when he wrote that the strength of the Red Army lies in its reserves, while its weakness lies in its generals.

Actually, this could have been stopped, because the 1941 blitzkrieg was over. The next successful blitz operation on the Eastern Front had to wait six months. Neither the further actions of the Germans, nor the winter counteroffensive of the Red Army to the canons of this theory

Not

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answered. Yes, the Germans were still planning another giant cauldron, assuming to bypass Moscow from the north and south and close the ring somewhere in the Orekhovo-Zuyevo region. Although before the fulfillment of this sweet dream, they were like walking to the moon. They didn't get there.

In short, the German troops made another breakthrough towards Moscow, and, oddly enough, the biggest threat to the capital was not the army of the super-energetic Guderian and not the strongest army of Göppner, but the army of Reinhardt, which somehow remained in the shadows. It was she who broke through closest to Moscow, going to Dmitrov, Yakhroma, Krasnaya Polyana. It was her officers who "looked at the Kremlin through binoculars," as Dr. Goebbels claimed. But by this time, the German armies were completely drained of blood. What kind of capture of Moscow can one rave about when General Raus directly writes: "Having built the defense of the division around the 5 surviving tanks of Colonel Koll, we managed to beat off the first attacks of the Siberians..." If the entire tank division can be counted on the fingers of one hand, then wait for the inevitable victory. Or another example: Guderian's main strike force, the XU motorized corps, retained as many as 11 guns. This is a lot, since even the fingers of two hands are not enough for us to count the corps artillery.

| On December 14, Kluge's 4th Army made some convulsive attempts to advance, but achieved nothing, and on December 5, the Red Army launched a counteroffensive. Operation Gaifun is over.

Summary. The stunning successes of the first operations on the Eastern Front masked the viciousness and adventurism of the Barbarossa plan from almost everyone, and above all, the lack of forces. In 1941, the Germans failed to solve the problem of supplying the advancing armies. The commanders of the army groups strove to encircle the enemy forces (the ideal of a blitzkrieg), but the pockets became more and more gigantic, and the liquidation of the encircled groupings turned into an increasingly difficult task. It ended with

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that the last boilers forced the Germans to lose too much time without achieving a decisive success. Blitzkrieg demanded great independence from commanders, and very often they acted within the framework of directives, not orders. However, this led to the emergence of figures like Rommel and Guderian. They were able, carried away by their own ideas and pursuing their own goals, to act in such a way that the overall plan of the operation collapsed. All this was especially evident during the battle near Moscow. None of the sides can boast of their actions here, but the Germans lost the battle. This means that their shortcomings and mistakes turned out to be much greater than ours.

Chapter 8 ROMMEL THE GREAT AND TERRIBLE

North Africa, it seems, was created by God himself as an ideal theater for tank troops. Endless plains allow you to maneuver as you please, transfer forces to the desired point and facilitate the operations of aviation, since it is almost impossible to hide from it. However, the irony of fate lies in the fact that in 1940 the first opponents met there, who did not even have a remote idea of what a blitzkrieg is. No, of course, both Marshal Graziani and General Wavell had tanks at their disposal, only they did not know how to use them at all. Graziani's position was further complicated by the fact that

that the Italian soldiers frankly did not want to fight. The Marshal had four times as many forces, so he had to show downright fantastic ingenuity in order to find reasons for postponing the offensive. Only constant prodding from Rome forced him, after three months of delay, to cross the frontier of Egypt. The advance (it is by no means impossible to call it an offensive) lasted for 5 whole days: from September 12 to 17.

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After that, Graziani considered his task completed and stopped, ordering the troops

dig in.

Seeing the complete passivity of the enemy, the British grew bolder and decided to try to attack the enemy. Let us emphasize right away that Operation Compass was not conceived as an offensive, even if it was a local one. It was nothing more than reconnaissance in force. Actually, it could not be otherwise, because the Italians outnumbered the British in manpower by 5 times, in artillery by 12 times, in tanks by 2 times. The only trump card of the British was the Matilda tanks, about a meeting with a cat

rymi near Arras in May 1940, Rommel had the most | bad memories. It was hard to decide even on reconnaissance, and only on December 7 the Western Desert Detachment, under the command of General O'Connor, set out from Mersa Matruh. On December 9, British troops approached the fortified Nibeiwa camp and attacked it. No tactical frills, no interaction of dissimilar forces... Everything was done in the sweet, naive style of the period of the last war — the Matilda tanks launched a frontal attack right on the barbed wire and trenches. But, as it turned out, the Italians were not even ready for this. The result - 4000 prisoners and the defeated camp, the commandant, General Pietro Maletti, was killed. After that, the British tanks moved on, and by the evening two more fortified Italian camps were destroyed. | On December 1, one of the brigades of the 7th Armored Division attacked the retreating Italians and captured 14,000 prisoners and 88 guns. However, as Italian historians proudly declare, this did not prevent General Bergonzoli, at the head of a tank company, from retreating to Bardia.

After these clashes, the Italian 10th Army ceased to exist as an organized force. The remnants of her units rolled in disarray further west, towards Bardia, unpursued. The fact is that the British were simply confused, having won such a grandiose victory, which they clearly did not count on. They not only stopped at the decisive moment when it was possible to complete the complete defeat of the enemy, but on the orders of the command one of O'Connor's infantry divisions was sent back to

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Egypt. The defeated Italians fled to the west, the victorious British moved rapidly to the east. True, then Wavell realized that something incomprehensible was happening, and transferred a fresh infantry division from Palestine to the front. Such was the level of strategic thinking of the British command.

However, the unexpected respite did not help the Italians. On January 3, 1941, British troops stormed Bardia. Tanks moved ahead - all 22 Matildas at once. The fighting, let's call it that, lasted three days, after which the garrison surrendered - 45,000 people, 462 guns, 129 tanks. The British then moved further west towards Tobruk and attacked it on 21 January. The next day the garrison capitulated - 30,000 men, 236 guns, 7 tanks. This time the English attack was led by 16 Matildas.

And here the British finally lost their heads. North Africa could be taken with bare hands, only one thing was required - not to stop. However, the British stopped. In battles against the Italians, such clumsiness and sluggishness went unpunished, but soon the British were to meet with a completely different enemy. Clouds began to gather on the horizon - Hitler decided to help the collapsing ally. At first, it was about sending some kind of "protective detachment" to Africa, but it soon became clear that the forces

Even the Germans cannot hold Tripolitania with a single brigade, and a decision was made to send a whole corps there, consisting of two divisions. So the famous VAK was born - Oeshshch5sVe AyolKaKogrz.

Meanwhile, the British continued their offensive, but now the terrible Matildas were left behind, and only a brigade of medium tanks came out to Beda Fomm - as many as 29 pieces. This did not affect the result - 20,000 prisoners, 216 guns, 120 tanks. All these achievements cost the 7th Armored Division 9 killed and 15 wounded. It is therefore not at all surprising that Eden put into circulation a new version of Churchill's phrase about the Battle of Britain: "Never so much was surrendered by so many to so few!" By March 1941, the British offensive in Libya was over. They are about

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moved more than 800 kilometers, took 130,000 prisoners, including 22 generals, destroyed and captured 400 tanks and 1,290 guns, while losing about 1,800 people. The path to Benghazi and beyond, to the borders of French Tunisia, was open. One more small effort and the Axis troops would be finally thrown out of Africa, after which they would hardly have been able to appear there, given the dominance of the British fleet in the Mediterranean. But British Prime Minister Winston Churchill was seized by an unbearable military itch (note that his intervention in military affairs always ended very badly for Great Britain), and all the most combat-ready units were nevertheless sent to Greece. No one knew how 2 divisions would be able to stop the advance of the German 12th Army, but they were sent.

And just at that time, a man arrives in Africa who will give the British an exemplary lesson - General Erwin Rommel. After the defeat of Graziani, von Brauchitsch sent General Baron von Funk to Africa. He was to carry out detailed reconnaissance and take command of those German troops that would be sent to the aid of the Italians. However, in Germany, von Funk had to personally report to Hitler, who recognized him as the staff officer of the disgraced General von Fritsch. Therefore, von Funk was quickly replaced as Hitler's favorite. Rommel flew to Tripoli on February 12, but only a month later did any noticeable German forces appear there - the 5th Light Regiment. Prior to this, Rommel had only had to rely on fake tanks riveted from plywood on the basis of trucks.

On March 21, Rommel launched an offensive, which also should not have developed into a major operation, since he had only an understaffed 5th Light Division at his disposal. The arrival of the 15th Panzer Division was expected only in May, after which the Germans were going to start fighting in earnest. However, now the British were unable to offer the Germans practically no resistance and rolled back at the same speed with which they had previously attacked. April 3

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Rommel captured Benghazi, on April 8 Gazala was captured, on April 1 Tobruk was surrounded. That was a real lightning war! If the British did this way in 3 months, then Rommel needed only 2 weeks. The British commanders did not even imagine that it was possible to advance at such a speed, because on April 9, during the reconnaissance of what was considered a deep rear, the commander of the Western Desert detachment, General O'Connor, and the commander of the troops in Egypt, General Nim. But on the whole, Rommel's general catch turned out to be poorer than that of the British—only 6 generals.

Having reached the border with Egypt, Rommel stopped. The reason was more than prosaic - he simply did not have the troops to advance further. So far, he received as reinforcements only 2 Italian divisions, the combat capability of which was more than doubtful. The British are proud that Tobruk withstood a long siege, but this was not at all surprising. So far, Rommel only indicated the assaults, by no means intending to spend his strength on taking the city. It should be noted that up to now it was not the British who hindered Rommel the most, but his own superiors. At first, he had to force the commander of the 5th Light Division, General Shtreich, to withstand

the prescribed pace of advance. Then the Chief of the Italian General Staff, General Gariboldi, burst into a series of hysterical calls to stop. Later, in response to Rommel's requests to expedite the dispatch of reinforcements, instead of tanks, they sent the Deputy Chief of the German General Staff, General Paulus, who was tasked with "preventing this soldier from completely losing his mind." Paulus clearly explained to Rommel that, in connection with the preparations for Operation Barbarossa, he could not count on new reinforcements. It's good if they send what they have already promised. For example, the same 15th Panzer Division was a month late. Since it was not possible to advance, Rommel tried to gain a foothold on the Libyan-Egyptian border, creating a chain there

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strongholds. True, in the presence of mobile forces, one could hope that they would not share the fate of the already destroyed Italian camps.

In May 1941, the British made their first half-hearted attempt to break the blockade of Tobruk, but their offensive faltered before it could even begin. And the only result was the capture by the Germans of the important mountain pass of Halfaya, which the British soon had to bitterly regret. After that, the British began to prepare a new offensive with the aim of deblocking Tobruk. A convoy arrived from England, delivering 238 tanks to Egypt, including 135 Matildas. On June 15, the British went on the offensive. This offensive showed the extent to which British commanders understood nothing about tank warfare. Literally all its basic principles were violated. The British did not conduct reconnaissance. The British did not use air support. The British did not stop their tanks, which ran into a tough defense. It is not difficult to predict the outcome in such cases. Exactly two tanks remained of the two tank battalions that stormed the passage of Halfaya, although they were met by only four 88-mm anti-aircraft guns, which the Germans had long been accustomed to using as anti-tank guns. An attempt to break through the Hafid Ridge ended in exactly the same way. 88-mm anti-aircraft guns shot British tanks with impunity, as if rubbed.

However, there is no such wall that you cannot try to break through your forehead. The next day, the British again tried to break through the Hafid Ridge. And if the day before they counted the losses by battalions, now the account has already gone to the brigades. On the third day, Rommel himself went on the offensive, intending to encircle the battered British grouping. But here the British demonstrated enviable mobility and managed to jump out of the planned cauldron. However, the losses of the parties speak for themselves - 91 British tanks against 12 German ones. The result of this failure was the removal of General Wavell from command, and General Auchinleck replaced him. (By the way, little re

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brand. His surname - AisSheskK - is read precisely as "Auchinleck", taking into account Celtic French roots. Therefore, the attempt of the Russian "Wikipedia" to turn it into "Ochinlek" deserves only regret.) But, as it turned out pretty quickly, this was the only conclusion that the British made from the results of the failed offensive.

Auchinleck energetically set to work, first trying to debunk Rommel, who had already become famous. But he did it more than peculiarly, issuing the following stupid order: |

TO ALL COMMANDERS AND CHIEF OF STAFF

From the Commander-in-Chief

There is a real danger that our friend Rommel will become a sorcerer or scarecrow for our soldiers. Too much is already being said about him. He is by no means a superhuman, although he is very energetic and has powers. Even if he were superhuman, it would be highly undesirable for our soldiers to believe in his supernatural power.

I want you to dispel in every possible way the notion that Rommel is anything more than an ordinary German general. For this, it seems important not to name Rommel when we talk about the enemy in Libya. We should mention the "Germans" or the "Axis" or the "enemy" but never focus on Rommel.

Please take measures for the immediate execution of this order and bring to the attention of all commanders that from a psychological point of view this is a matter of the highest importance.

(Signed) K.J. Auchinleck

General"

Of course, such an order only increased Rommel's reputation, not belittled it.

And yet, even with Rommel, things did not always go smoothly. After two unsuccessful attempts to release the blockade of Tobruk, the British undertook a third - operation "Krusier"

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der". After all, if three attempts are given in sports, then the English gentlemen, who have always considered war as a kind of sport (Count Ignatiev asserted this with full knowledge of the matter), also had the right to it. For this offensive, the British concentrated large forces: 7 fully equipped divisions, up to 770 tanks and 1,000 aircraft. So, after the change of commander, Churchill counted on a successful and grandiose offensive, but General Auchinleck did the same thing as the deposed Wavell - he began to demand reinforcements and look for reasons to prolong the offensive. The growth of forces led to a change in organizational structures. The Western Desert Detachment first became the Army of the Nile, and then the 8th Army under the command of General Cunningham, divided into two corps: XIII and XXX.

These forces were opposed by 10 battered Axis divisions, of which only 3 were German, some 400 tanks and 450 aircraft. As often happens in such cases, the Germans tried to disguise the weakness of their forces by assigning formidable names to their formations. If at first it was, as we have already said, a "protective detachment", then with the arrival of Rommel it turned into the German African Corps - DSSF Afrika Korps, although it did not receive a single extra soldier. Further - more, in the summer of 1941 it turns into the Africa Panzer Group. Alas, the 15th and 21st tank and 90th light divisions remained in its composition. Yes, of course, a few Italian divisions should be added, but their combat effectiveness was and remains more than doubtful, and participation in operations was most often purely symbolic. As they say, we plowed. That is, unlike the English renaming, the non-Metsky ones were purely psychological in nature. Actually, I'm afraid to think what could happen if the ratio of the number of Italian and German divisions were reversed.

Externally, the plan of the British looked logical: to pin down the Axis forces at the front by attacking the XIII Corps, while the XXX Corps would bypass their right flank and destroy the tank divisions.

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Rommel and link up with the Tobruk garrison. But when you start to consider it more carefully, it becomes clear that the whole plan is a formal outrage against the principles of tank warfare. The British evenly spread their tank brigades along the entire front. Rommel noted that the British put three of their tank brigades under attack in turn.

The British offensive began on 18 November and went smoothly at first. The 7th Armored Brigade outflanked the enemy positions and moved on, pushing back the weak German barriers. At this time, the 22nd Panzer Brigade attacked the Italian Panzer Division "Ariete", but acted so ineptly that the Italians held out, destroying 40 out of 160

attacking British tanks. Still, the British achieved some success by capturing the airfield of Sidi Rezegh. But the first bell has already rung. The Germans suddenly attacked the sprawling column of the 4th Armored Brigade and battered its rear. The British were still lucky, because the Germans mistakenly sent the 15th Panzer Division in the other direction. But on December 20, she attacked the 4th brigade and destroyed another 40 British tanks.

But quite unexpectedly for himself on November 21, Rommel was stabbed in the back. The 70th division, which formed the basis of the Tobruk garrison, struck towards their tanks. To the great amazement of the Germans, up to 50 infantry tanks participated in this attack. But the meeting did not take place, as the 7th brigade got involved in an oncoming battle with approaching German tanks. Skillfully using artillery, the Germans destroyed the brigade, in which only 28 tanks out of 160 remained.

Nevertheless, the British looked to the future with optimism, since Rommel was forced to divide his divisions again. Tobruk remained to block only the 21st Panzer. XXX Corps could break through to the fortress, but its commander, General Norrie, decided to be careful, since he had only 200 tanks left. Rommel could only dream of such a number, and therefore, most likely out of envy, he struck on November 22, knocking out the British from the Sidi Rezegh airfield.

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The British lost another 50 tanks, mostly from

22nd brigade. The British tried to retake

airfield, but this only led to another hecatomb. For example, from the 7th armored brigade, only

.. to 4 tanks, and in just 4 days of fighting the British lost 530 tanks

kov against 100 German. But on the front of the XIII Corps, the British managed to finish off

more notable success. We took several small

strongholds, others were surrounded. But 23 but-

In November, Rommel again tried to seize the initiative.

Bringing together his two panzer divisions, with the help of the Italian panzer division "Ariete", he tried to cut off and destroy the broken parts of the XXX Corps. At the cost of serious losses, he destroyed one infantry brigade, but the remnants of the English group escaped from the encirclement. However, here Rommel began to show indecisiveness uncharacteristically for himself. His panzer divisions either rushed east to strongholds on the border, then returned west to Tobruk. Naturally, such throwing did not bring success, but brought new losses, since the British aircraft attacked the German columns on the march. The orders were either not received by the troops, or were completely misunderstood.

In a word, the end of November became a black period for Rommel. For the first time he had to retreat in order to save the remnants of his troops. He had no more than 60 tanks left, while the British, constantly receiving new equipment, had five times as many. The 2nd New Zealand Division, supported by 90 tanks, managed to break through to Tobruk, where the fleet delivered another 70 tanks. On November 27, the 15th Panzer Division was attacked by the 22nd and 4th armored brigades, but managed to fight back. However, for the British, too, not everything went smoothly. Although Cunningham managed to break through the corridor to Tobruk, he did not hope to hold these positions and suggested that Auchinleck withdraw his troops. To this Auchinleck replied with an unusually stern order: "There can be only one order: "Attack and pursue," and then, after a little thought, according to

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simply removed Cunningham, replacing him with his deputy chief of staff, General Ritchie.

Now Rommel was intent on destroying the 2nd New Zealand Division and isolating Tobruk again. The capture of the fortress was not even discussed, since it was completely clear to the German commanders that they simply did not have enough troops for this. However, as it turned out, the troops were not enough to destroy the New Zealanders. In the course of stubborn fighting, he managed to destroy one of the brigades, but the remnants of the division managed to retreat. At the same time, the British tank brigades coolly watched what was happening.

Tobruk was cut off again, and now Rommel feared for the fate of the garrisons cut off on the Libyan-Egyptian border. On December 2, he sent two battalion battle groups to break through to Bardia and Capuzio, hoping then to move there the main forces, which had so far put themselves in order. The decrease in the scale of hostilities is visible to the naked eye - instead of divisions, battalions went into action. But the British did not experience such problems, Ritchie took up a business that would soon become familiar to him - replenishment and reorganization of battered and defeated brigades. On 5 December another skirmish took place, during which 49 tanks of the Afrika Korps (all that was left) defeated the 11th Indian Brigade, while 126 tanks of the 4th Armored stood quietly nearby. The organic vice of the British army is becoming more and more clear — a complete inability to establish interaction between units and formations. We will do this again and again

we will face.

By December 7, Panzer Group Africa had suffered such losses that Rommel made the forced decision to lift the blockade of Tobruk and withdraw to the Gazala line, where the Italian rear units had prepared defensive positions. From Rome, he was told that he could not count on making up for losses, so he had no other choice. The Italian X Corps was located off the coast, followed by the Italian XX Corps, further south -

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Italian mobile group: armored and motorized divisions. Behind the southern flank stood the Afrika Korps.

The British attempted to attack the Ghazala line on the move, but once again the 7th Indian Brigade was forced to fight the Afrika Korps to the approving applause of the 7th Armored Division, which did not want to intervene. So far, the Germans managed to hold out, but after three days of fighting on December 14, only 8 tanks remained in the Afrika Korps. There were 30 more in the Ariete division. It was unthinkable to defend with such forces, and Rommel continued his retreat to the border of Cyrenaica. Only there, on December 19, did it receive the first reinforcements since the start of Operation Crusader - as many as 30 tanks. This allowed him to suddenly attack and defeat the presumptuous 22nd armored brigade, which lost 65 tanks. But the bitterness of defeat to the British brightened up the surrender of the encircled garrisons on the Libyan border. In general, one thing can be said: it was not Rommel who suffered the defeat, but the Axis command, which was unable or unwilling to organize the delivery of reinforcements to Africa. If Rommel had received at least a quarter of what Cunningham and Ritchie had ruined ineptly, he most likely would have taken Tobruk and reached Alexandria. But it turned out the way it did, and everything had to start over. |

After the New Year, Rommel went on the offensive and by 4 February was back in the Gazala line. After that, there was a respite, during which both sides prepared for a decisive battle. But when it started, things didn't go quite the way Rommel and Ritchie had planned. However, Rommel managed to reorganize during the operation and quickly responded to unexpected changes in the situation. But the British command, and at all levels, once again showed that no lesson was good for him. ,

Probably every general has his finest hour, his most brilliant battle. Napoleon, let's say, was always proud of Austerlitz. Indeed, such a crystal clear and convincing

victory over superior forces

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Few can boast of an enemy. Rommel, oddly enough, did not have such victories. Yes, the battle of Ghazala was an outstanding success, but too many mistakes were made by the enemy. Only this brought victory to the Germans, because there was a period when Rommel stood on the verge of defeat.

But let's look at this battle in more detail, because it was in it that the diametrically opposed views of the German and British generals on a tank war were most clearly manifested. |

After the winter fighting, there was a short lull - both sides made up for losses and prepared for the offensive. But if Rommel rushed forward and thirsted for battle, then the commander of the British forces in the Middle East, General Auchinleck, had to be pushed and kicked, as Marshal Graziani had previously been. And just like Mussolini, Churchill lost patience and simply threatened to remove Auchinleck. The only thing he managed to achieve was a postponement until mid-June "to build up strength." Rommel did not wait and went on the offensive himself on May 26, 1942.

This time, the forces of the parties were much larger than during Operation Crusader. The British had about [75,000 soldiers and 843 tanks; another 420 tanks could be sent as reinforcements. Rommel had only 80,000 soldiers and 560 tanks, of which 230 were Italian, of purely symbolic combat value. However, the value of British cruiser tanks can also be called into question. In artillery, the British had one and a half superiority, and only the air forces of the opponents were approximately equal. The British dug in securely, covered their positions with dense minefields and, as it seemed to them, secured themselves against any surprises. However, they thought in terms of the last war and underestimated the maneuverability and mobility of motorized formations, so the southern flank of the position turned out to be completely insufficiently protected. In addition, their positions had the same organic flaw that let the Italians down.

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tsev in 1940. Separate strongholds were isolated, and the gaps between them nobody defended.

So, on May 26 at 1400, the Italian X and XX[G Corps began artillery preparation, feigning an offensive along the entire front line. But the main blow was delivered to the south, bypassing the British positions. Operation "Venice" began on May 27 at 4.30. On the left flank of the shock group, the Italian XX Corps of General Baldassare was advancing, which had 228 tanks. However, Rommel took a sober look at the combat capabilities of the Italians and assigned them a supporting role. Lieutenant-General Nering's Afrika Korps advanced in the center, and the 90th Light Division on the extreme right flank, which had a long journey through the desert. Rommel ordered his divisions to follow in battle order. Tanks led the columns, trucks with infantry followed them, artillery, sappers, and signalmen closed the line. Behind the battle columns moved supply groups. This was precisely the essence of German tactics - the offensive was carried out by balanced formations of various types of troops, while the British still considered tanks as some kind of armored cavalry that did not need support.

Oddly enough, the Italians were the first to distinguish themselves. South of Bir Hakeim, as Rommel's troops began to turn left to get behind the British lines, the Ariete Panzer Division unexpectedly ran into the camp of the 3rd Indian Brigadier. Probably, in the dark, the Italians simply did not make out who they were dealing with, because literally 30 minutes later it was all over. However, the darkness deceived the British as well, because Brigadier Philous managed to radio that he was attacked by "a whole division of filthy German tanks." However, the British command - General Ritchie (8th Army) and General Norrie (XXX Corps) - simply did not believe that a large-scale night offensive was possible. Just in case, they sent the 4th to the south

armored brigade, as it was believed that this was enough. Indeed, everything ended very quickly.

Curious detail. Among the prisoners was Sir Walter Cowan, a 71-year-old British admiral who

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retired in 1931 and accompanied the 18th Cavalry Regiment as a volunteer. He emptied the barrel of his revolver by firing at the T-Sh tank and was trying to reload it when the tank commander jumped out of the turret and grabbed the admiral.

First, the 90th Light Division ran into patrols from the British 7th Mechanized Brigade. After a short skirmish, the British fled, but the Germans moved in the same direction, and almost faster than the British. In any case, they arrived at the fortified position of Retma at the same time, so the British failed to catch on, and they were forced to continue their flight. Thus, only 6 hours had passed since the start of the offensive, and two British brigades had already been completely defeated. And then there was a meeting that turned out to be unexpected for both sides. The advanced regiment of the 4th armored brigade ran into the column of the 15th tank division of the Germans. The British were saved from immediate destruction by the fact that the regiment was armed with heavy (by the standards of the African theater) Grant tanks. Therefore, the German forward echelon suffered losses, but the division commander, General von First, quickly ordered one battalion to outflank the British, advanced a battery of terrible 88-mm anti-aircraft guns to the other flank, and the battle ended there. And then the second regiment of the brigade approached, which ran into the deployed orders of the Germans and was destroyed before he had time to understand what was happening. Such was the coordination of the actions of the British units. The thunder of the brigade completed the destruction of the third regiment, which collided with the German 21st Panzer Division. The remnants of the brigade managed to stop only after running 32 kilometers. The 7th armored division of the British actually ceased to exist, having lost 3 brigades out of 4. In addition, the headquarters column of the division flew into the vanguard of the 90th light division, and the entire staff was taken prisoner.

The only bright spot was that the Italian Panzer Division "Ariete", which tried to take the stronghold of Bir Hakeim, which was defended by the Free French Infantry Brigade, was thrown back. However, this

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the hitch did not slow down the pace of the advance of the German divisions. Before the 8th Army there was a very real prospect of being surrounded. We had to act, and act quickly. However, the British commanders were confused. General Norrie lost his head and sent another brigade to meet the Germans, now from the 1st Armored Division. The 22nd armored brigade moved forward briskly, lost 30 tanks in half an hour and rolled back. It was only after that that Norrie realized that something was wrong and ordered the 2nd Armored Brigade to attack the right flank of the Germans, devoting all of the divisional artillery to support. This blow brought some success, as the Germans stopped. More serious, however, was the lack of fuel and ammunition after a full day of non-stop fighting.

The Italians advancing to the left, after a single success, began to act in their usual manner. The Ariete Panzer Division collided with the British II armored brigade and immediately stopped, while the Grieste motorized division from the same XX Corps simply disappeared. It was supposed to break through the minefields north of Bir Hakeim and provide a supply route for the Afrika Korps, but...

Summing up the results of the first day of the operation, Rommel was forced to suspend the offensive and even pull back the 90th Light Division. On 28 May he threw the 21st Panzer Division forward, still hoping to break through to the sea and completely encircle the British 8th Army, but this attempt was thwarted by scattered British attacks. Still, they had too many tanks. On May 29, the Germans stood still, although Rommel personally led a supply convoy around Bir-

Hakeima. But this path was too long and unreliable. If the crisis was avoided, the problems persisted.

On May 29, two things happened: good and bad. Let's start with the bad, the plane of General Kruvel, who commanded the northern group of troops, was shot down, and the general was taken prisoner. TO.

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One of the good events is that the "Grieste" division managed to make a passage through undefended minefields and made its way to Rommel's semi-encircled group. Supply problems have become an order of magnitude easier. But in any case, the German offensive stalled, and Rommel began to gradually withdraw his troops to the west. A less energetic or, rather, less impudent commander would certainly have begun to consider options for retreating to his original positions, satisfied with the serious losses inflicted on the enemy, but not Rommel. That's what he was not to borrow - so it's optimism and healthy impudence.

As a result, an original situation was created, which the authors inclined to excessive dramatism called the Cauldron. That's right, with a capital letter: Samagop. Formally, Rommel's troops were surrounded, as Ritchie's corps pressed them against the main defensive position of the 8th Army. However, the strongholds at Bir Hakeim and Sidi Muftah, occupied by the British, were themselves isolated. In addition, as we have already said, Rommel now had, if not a road, then a path just between these English positions, along which he could organize the delivery of supplies.

May 30 did not bring any cardinal changes in the situation. The Germans withdrew a little to the west and took up strong defensive positions on the ridges of the hills. General Lumsden, the commander of the English Panzer Division, once again showed in full brilliance the intellectual qualities of the British generals. Having three brigades, he organized successively three separate attacks, allowing the German anti-aircraft gunners to once again practice safe shooting at tanks.

Still, Rommel's position remained difficult. He absolutely had to eliminate the British stronghold in Sidi Muftah, which was occupied by the 150th brigade. On May 20, the brigade beat off all attacks, and General Ritchie radioed: "Well done!" But this was the only help provided by the command of the 8th Army.

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nym. General Gott's XIII Corps, which included the unfortunate brigade, took up a position of strict neutrality. During the second assault on May 31, the British defenses were broken through, although individual centers of resistance still held out. On June 1, Rommel ordered the positions of the 150th brigade to be subjected to massive bombardment, and after fierce fighting, the remnants of the brigade surrendered. Outcome: Rommel restored contact with his rear, took 3,000 prisoners and 124 guns. The 8th Army applauded the heroes, but did not move.

However, even now Rommel was not able to calmly deal with the second aching tooth - the stronghold of Bir Hakeim, which was occupied by the French. Auchinleck, plucking up his courage, decided to liquidate the Cauldron by a concentric attack from all sides. There were chances for this, since the British still had superior forces, it was only necessary to use these forces correctly. Alas. The northern face of the Cauldron was attacked by the 32nd tank brigade, and practically without artillery support. The result was the same — 50 out of 70 tanks were destroyed.

The events on the eastern front took on a more dramatic character. On June 5, the 10th Indian Brigade attacked the positions of the Italian division "Ariete" and broke through them. Deciding that success had been achieved, General Ritchie threw the 22nd Armored Brigade into the gap, unaware that the main German defensive position was further away. The degree of illiteracy of the British commanders underlines the order of the commander of the 7th Armored Division, who categorically

demanded that the infantry not interfere with the actions of the tanks. Recall that the essence of the blitzkrieg tactics was the interaction of different types of troops, but the British did not manage to understand this until the very end of the war. The result is quite predictable. The tank brigade lost 60 out of 156 tanks, but managed to escape, and two infantry brigades were completely destroyed, with Rommel capturing all the artillery of the 5th Indian division. Rommel simply did not understand what was happening, why the British let themselves be beaten piece by piece,

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This is what his journal entries say. However, he made good use of the opportunities given to him.

Now Rommel turned his attention to Bir Hakeim. After three days of stubborn fighting and intense bombing, the battered French brigade slipped out of the encirclement under the cover of darkness.

The British got a little respite while Rommel fiddled with Bir Hakeim, but they failed to make good use of it. Yes, they somehow replenished the battered tank brigades, but the spirit of the officers and soldiers was broken. Everyone, from General Norry, in whose corps all tank units were united, to the last infantryman, no longer believed that they could defeat the Terrible Rommel. On paper, the British still outnumbered the enemy. Somewhat unexpected is the question of the forces of the opponents. This is easy to explain—mobile workshops put wrecked tanks into operation, reinforcements came from the rear bases, but that didn't make it any easier. For example, the 4th Armored Brigade was understaffed at least twice, almost from scratch. It is believed that by June 11, there were 185 tanks in the two tank divisions, including 77 "Grants", which decisively surpassed everything that the Germans could put up against them. The 32nd Army Tank Brigade had 85 serviceable infantry tanks. There were about 60 more tanks in the 1st army armored brigade. Rommel had just over 200 tanks left after heavy fighting, but 85 of them were paltry Italian M13Zs and German T-Ps.

After defeats, it is customary to look for the guilty, and the British generals began to vigorously blame each other, especially the commanders of the tank divisions Lumsden and Messervy, who began to hate each other, distinguished themselves in this. In addition, the brigade commanders of the Messervy division quarreled among themselves and with Messervy himself. Ritchie finally let go of the reins, allowing corps commanders Norrie and Gott to overrule any Army Headquarters plan. In such an environment of chaos and disagreement, one could not even dream of any success. The southern flank of the positions of the 8th Army was crushed and bent

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east. The army found itself in a semi-encirclement, which could easily turn into a complete one if Rommel managed to break through to the sea. He intended to do so.

, Rommel expected the British to attack him on the morning of June 12, but the British commanders, absorbed by oklokami and showdowns, it was not up to the Germans. Gogda Rommel himself moved the 15th Panzer Division forward, ordering the 21st Panzer Division to turn around the British right flank. In addition, the German anti-tank guns, moving forward, began to fire on the British tanks from the other flank. No wonder they rolled back. In just one day, the British did not lose 138 tanks. The next day, the German advance to the north continued. Attempts to stop him only led to the destruction of a new portion of British tanks, but still Rommel slowed down a little, and this allowed Ritchie to withdraw two infantry divisions, pointlessly sticking out in defensive positions at Gazala, with the 1st South African division having to break through the positions Italians. What began was what was later sarcastically called the "Gazal's gallop".

When reconnaissance planes informed Rommel on June 15 that the British were hastily retreating to the east, he ordered them to be pursued, counting on the shoulders of the enemy to break into Tobruk.

The attempts of the British to detain him had only partial success: after a short delay, the Germans continued to rush forward. On June 17, the replenished (for the umpteenth time already?) 4th armored brigade tried to stop Rommel, but the oncoming battle with the German 15th and 21st tank divisions and the Ariete tank division ended in its defeat (for the umpteenth time contract?).

On June 18, one of those events took place that are outwardly imperceptible, but are of tremendous significance. German tank divisions captured the warehouses of the 8th Army in the Belhamed area, which the British were unable to either evacuate or destroy. A huge amount of food, fuel and ammunition allowed Rommel's army to fight freely for several more months. By the way, given the huge number of captured British guns, ammunition

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sy were also very helpful. On the same day, German troops reached the coast, cutting off Tobruk. The last act of a grandiose tragedy was coming.

This time, the British were not going to hold Tobruk to the last. First of all, the commander of the Mediterranean Fleet, Admiral Cunningham, flatly refused to supply the fortress. The British historian dryly reports that the admiral did not choose expressions. However, the commander of the XIII Corps, General Gott, assured Ritchie that the fortress would hold out freely for several months. He even asked that he, Gott, be appointed commandant of Tobruk. However, Rommel had his own point of view on this subject, which differed markedly from the English one. He was not going to bother with a long siege and wanted to take the fortress by storm in order to continue the pursuit of the defeated 8th Army.

The garrison of the fortress consisted of the 2nd South African division of General Klopper, who at the same time was the commandant of the fortress, the 201st Guards Brigade, the 32nd Army Armored Brigade, artillery units - a total of 35,000 people. In general, quite significant forces, so Gott's calculations could be considered reasonable, if not for the broken spirit of the British, who turned out to be incapable of any resistance to the NIJ at all.

On June 19, the Germans regrouped their forces and prepared for an assault. It began on the morning of June 20 with a powerful air strike. General Kesselring, who was in command of aviation, used all the aircraft he had. During the day they made at least 580 sorties, to which should be added almost 200 sorties of Italian aircraft. At the same time, the Germans lost only 3 aircraft. Starting at 5:20 a.m., the German artillery subjected the southwestern corner of the defensive perimeter of the fortress to intense shelling. This led to the fact that the Indian battalion occupying this area offered practically no resistance. Rommel later wrote, "I can personally attest to the stunning effect of the attack. Huge fountains of dust

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rose above the fortifications occupied by the Indians. Debris and weapons flashed through the air. A few direct hits just swept away the barbed wire." At 6.30 the German infantry and sappers began to move forward, and by 7.03 the defense was already broken.

After that, the tanks of the 15th division were thrown into the gap. The sappers set up bridges across the anti-tank ditch in the depths of the defense, and the German tanks rushed forward. It was assumed that the 32nd brigade would meet such breakthroughs with counterattacks, but the British once again repeated the traditional mistake, failing to concentrate forces. The battalions, one by one, went out to meet the German tanks and simply evaporated, not even being able to enter into the battle. And after that, someone talks about the national championship in stepping on a rake? No, it's time to hold the championship, if not the world, then Europe for sure.

If Rommel was in the battle formations of the advancing and saw everything with his own eyes, then General Klopper had no idea about the situation. And it was already catastrophic. The entire eastern part of the defensive perimeter collapsed, the mobile reserve was destroyed. TO

At 1400, German tanks broke through to the city and moved further west, leaving the infantry to clear out the bypassed resistance nodes. Around 16:00 they approached Kloppe's command post, who had to hastily flee. He still hoped to hold the western part of the fortress, where the South African troops were located, who did not join the battle. However, the general soon changed his mind and ordered the troops to break out of the fortress under the cover of darkness, but very, very few succeeded. Only one battalion of the Scots Guards broke through in an organized manner. "We could only be glad that they captured so much British equipment, since none of the Germans guessed who we were. Several times their columns even stopped to let us through," recalled one of his officers.

On June 21, at 0940, General Kloppe surrendered to the commander of the XX] Italian Corps, General Navarini. Here is such an echid

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A real smirk of fate — during the assault, the Italians calmly watched what was happening, blocking the western section of the perimeter, but it fell to them to accept the surrender. About 33,000 soldiers surrendered, but worse, the Germans captured about 2,000 serviceable vehicles and more than 2 million gallons of gasoline. As always, individual units continued to resist, not believing the surrender order, so small-scale battles continued for more than a day.

However, Hitler appreciated the merits of Rommel and on the evening of June 21 he promoted him to field marshal. Rommel became the most famous and youngest German field marshal. "I am a field marshal, it is like a sweet dream," he wrote later. He celebrated his new title in a characteristic manner - he ate a can of pineapples and drank a small bottle of whiskey from the booty captured from the British. After dinner, he became more gloomy. "Hitler made me a field marshal. But I would prefer that he send me a division," -

he wrote to his wife.

Rommel was sure that new triumphs and victories lay ahead of him. At first, his confidence was justified. On the wave of success, he continued the offensive, although these victories undermined the strength of his army. The total strength of the German infantry in the three divisions was only 2,500, and the Italians could add another 6,000. 60 tanks made up the entire strike force of Panzer Group Africa. A day after the capture of Tobruk, Rommel's troops reached the Egyptian border, joining the 90th Light Division, which was in contact with the enemy. An attempt to hold off the Germans by XIII Corps failed, and Gott's troops rolled further east towards the rest of the 8th Army, occupying positions near Mersa Matruh.

But the fight failed again. Given the bitter experience of previous battles, Auchinleck ordered his tanks to engage in battle only in favorable conditions. This gave a result, although hardly the one that the British general was counting on. The 90th Light Division quickly crossed the minefields and on June 27 cut the escape routes from Mer

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sa-Matruh. The 21st Panzer Division took a little longer to clear the minefields, but it also crossed them. As a result, the fresh X corps of General Holmes, which occupied positions, got into pincers and fled after a short resistance. Some problem was created only by the 1st New Zealand Division, which had just arrived in Egypt and did not yet know that Rommel was to be feared. But Rommel personally led the attack of the 90th Light Division, and it was all over, although he simply did not have enough soldiers to delay the British. And again, large warehouses fell into the hands of the Germans, which provided them with a comfortable life for a while.

The English army rolled on - to El Alamein. The Germans never managed to capture this position on the move, because the African distances, which were not much different from the Russian ones, simply ate up Rommel's army. The field marshal exulted: "It is only 100 miles to Alexandria." But he was not destined to overcome this distance. The first and most important reason is that he

simply lacked strength. The Eastern Front, like a gigantic vacuum cleaner, was drawing out all the non-German reserves, and it was physically impossible to carve out troops for the African theater. The most he could count on was the replenishment of all the same three divisions. The second reason was the exceptional natural defensive power of this position. The left flank of the British rested on the Qattara lowland, impassable for tanks, so Rommel was deprived of the opportunity to use his favorite outflanking. He was forced to storm the British positions in the forehead, and here the colossal superiority of the British in forces affected. Rommel's attacks bogged down, the African blitzkrieg ended.

Chapter 9 GENERAL PROBLEMS, COMMON ERRORS

front, I would like a lengthy quote from the story of the Strugatsky brothers "The Tale of the Troika":
"Godzilla burned through the wall

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between Aukalka and Ugolovnitsa, burst into the yard and went out to the rear of the defenders. However, he was a cudgel, according to rumors - the heftiest and most stupid of the four-headed dragons. He did not understand tactics and did not want to, and therefore, instead of crushing one tower after another with concentrated blows, he rushed at all four at once, since there were enough heads ... And Godzilla, of course, suffered through his stupidity and greed ... Having lost half of the heads, and without that, the narrow-minded Godzilla completely lost his mind, darted around the fortress, crushing his own and others, and, kicking, rushed into the retreat. Nat's fight is over."

The command of both sides behaved in approximately the same way. Both the Soviet troops and the Germans rushed at any target that they could, instead of inflicting one powerful blow in the most important direction. As a result, no one managed to achieve a decisive success, and all offensives ended in disasters for the attackers. The enemy willingly cut off one head after another to Godzilla, since he himself was substituted. The only difference was that the German Godzilla's necks were longer, and he managed to reach a little further, which did not save him from a sad end.

During winter operations, in particular during the Battle of Moscow, the German army suffered a heavy defeat. It still was not catastrophic, but the combat effectiveness of the Wehrmacht was seriously undermined. The Germans suffered tangible losses in manpower and colossal losses in equipment and heavy weapons. The Panzerwaffe, the main strike force of the Wehrmacht, was in a particularly deplorable state. According to Thomas Yenz, in January 1942, only 158 tanks from factories were combat-ready on the entire Eastern Front. All 1015 tanks that were in the army had one or another malfunction. In fact, in January 1942, the German tank forces simply did not exist. By March, the number of serviceable tanks was raised to 643, but you must admit that this is negligible. The condition of the infantry divisions was not the best either. Only 8 of them

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retained combat readiness, and another 50 were considered "limited combat readiness". The German generals were forced to state that they could not compensate for the losses in personnel.

But despite all this, Hitler did not abandon the idea of a new major offensive. A convenient explanation was found for all the troubles that had occurred - the Wehrmacht was defeated by "General Frost", but with the onset of summer, he would again show what he was capable of. Quiet squabbles broke out at the Fuhrer's headquarters. Each commander of an army group strove to pull the scanty blanket over himself and achieve an offensive precisely on his sector of the front. The fact that the German army was no longer capable of attacking everywhere became clear to everyone.

After much debate, on April 5, 1942, Hitler signed Directive No. 41. It provided for a series of successive operations, passing one into another. At first it was supposed

strike in the direction of Voronezh, then the panzer divisions should have turned south to form huge pincers along with the armies advancing from Kharkov. That is, we again see the same blitzkrieg in its hypertrophied, gigantic form. Next, the Germans were going to arrange another huge cauldron on the Don, and then turn to the Caucasus. In this way they were going to undermine the economic base of the Soviet Union, seize Donetsk coal, Kuban wheat, and Caucasian oil.

True, one thing remained unclear - what forces should be used to carry out this second series of Russian blitzkrieg. Even after the call of a million green recruits, the shortfall was more than half a million soldiers and officers. Panzer divisions now had an average of 130 tanks, but average is a very loose concept. For example, the 4th Panzer Division by the beginning of the summer offensive had about 50 tanks, the 16th - 90 tanks, the 22nd - 176 tanks. In general, only the divisions of the Army Group "South", which were to conduct the main offensive, were able to adequately equip them. By the way, the Soviet "History of the Second World War" indicates that by May 1942 the Wehrmacht had 3229 tanks, and

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the same Thomas Yenz gives the figure of 1791 tanks plus 536 new vehicles. The difference is 1000 tanks...

In order to somehow rectify the situation, the German command decided to make more active use of the Allied troops, which they still had to regret bitterly. Obviously, the Germans forgot the experience of using the Romanian divisions on the southernmost sector of the Eastern Front. It was possible to collect 52 divisions, which amounted to a quarter of their total number. Of course, Keitel or Jodl did not intend to use the Romanian or Italian divisions for active operations, but expected to cover the northern flank of the advancing German troops with them. Field Marshal Rundstedt stated bluntly: "Romanian officers and soldiers do not stand up to any criticism, the Italians are simply terrible, and the Hungarians only dream of getting home as soon as possible."

However, the Red Army did not wait until the Germans put their troops in order and tried to seize the initiative by conducting several offensive operations. Alas, they often ended in failure and led to serious losses. And most importantly for us, they did not even have a remote resemblance to blitzkrieg. That is why we will not consider the Toropetsk-Kholm operation and the Rzhev-Vyazemsk operation. If you like, it was a complete negation of the principles of blitzkrieg. But even in these unsuccessful offensives, there was one serious difference from the events of 1941, which the Germans did not notice. Otherwise, the OKW would have seriously thought before preparing their grandiose offensive plans. In 1941 the encirclement of the Soviet armies led to their quick and inglorious death, they simply crumbled into dust. In 1942, during a not very successful offensive near Vyazma, units of the 33rd Army of General Efremov ended up in the German rear. However, the army continued to fight for more than a month in complete encirclement, after which the heavily battered divisions still managed to break through to their own. The German attempt to encircle the 29th Army ended in the same way. The cavalry corps of General Belov managed to escape from the German rear. That is, the blitzkrieg mechanism frankly failed in those cases when the encircled troops

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resisted stubbornly. The period of the "cordon of the territory" is over, the "battles in the boilers" have begun. In fairness, it should be noted that the Soviet troops also faced the same problem in the Demyansk region. Somehow it suddenly turned out that it was not enough to surround the enemy divisions, they still needed to be destroyed, which at times was much more difficult to do.

Let's look at the boilers of 1941, without prejudice to the hardened stamps. What will we see then?

Minsk boiler. Resistance - none. The result is the complete destruction of the surrounded grouping. The actions of the Germans - the cordon of the area, the subsequent combing.

Kyiv boiler. Resistance - none. The result is the complete destruction of the encircled group. The actions of the Germans - the cordon of the area, the subsequent combing.

Smolensk boiler. Resistance is weak. Result - . almost complete destruction of the encircled grouping. The rescue of part of the troops was the result of Guderian's mistakes. The actions of the Germans - the cordon of the area, the subsequent combing.

Mogilev boiler. Resistance is fierce. The result is the almost complete annihilation of the encircled group. The actions of the Germans are the creation of an encirclement ring, the involvement of large forces of infantry and artillery, bound for a long time.

Bryansk boiler. Resistance is weak. The result is the destruction of most of the encircled group. The rescue of part of the troops was the result of Guderian's mistakes and lack of forces. The actions of the Germans are the creation of an encirclement, the involvement of large forces of infantry and artillery, connected not for too long, but at a critical moment.

Vyazemsky boiler. Resistance is weak. The result is the destruction of most of the encircled group. The rescue of part of the troops was the result of a lack of forces from the enemy. The actions of the Germans - the creation of a ring of encirclement, connected not for too long, but at a critical moment, the involvement of large forces of infantry and artillery,

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That is, we see that not always even successful blitz operations brought the desired results to the Germans. As time went on, these results became less and less significant.

The Battle of Kharkov in 1942 is interesting in that the intelligence of both opponents was not up to par. The Germans were preparing an offensive on the southern sector of the Friedrichus 1 front with the aim of destroying the Soviet troops on the Barvenkovsky ledge, and the Southwestern Front was preparing an attack on Kharkov from just this ledge. The second strike was supposed to be delivered from the Volchansk area, which would allow encircling two corps of the 6th Paulus Army. Neither one nor the other time did intelligence reveal the preparation of these operations. The Germans planned to start their offensive on May 16, but the Soviet offensive began 4 days earlier.

The offensive of the northern grouping from the Volchansk area by the forces of the 21st and 28th armies did not work out from the very beginning. Although the German tactical defenses were broken in some places, the greatest advance was made on the flanks and not in the center. As a result, the Axis of offensive deviated from the intended direction. Instead of advancing to the southwest, to Kharkov, the 28th Army actually turned to the northwest. It was there that our troops advanced the farthest, and there the most combat-ready divisions were concentrated. The commanders of both armies did not think why they were continuing their senseless offensive. However, already on May 13, the enemy launched a counterattack, using tank divisions prepared for their own offensive, and stopped the 28th Army, although the position of the Germans was extremely difficult. They had few reserves, they had to withdraw units from quiet sectors of the front. As a result, our troops advanced about 25 kilometers on a front that was just over 50 kilometers long.

As a result of the fighting on May 12–14, the northern strike force broke through the enemy defenses on a 56 km front. The advance of the "root" 28th Army was 20-25 km. If it were not for the counterattack of two panzer divisions, the offensive could be considered going practically according to plan. Soviet

the command expected the introduction of enemy reserves only on the 5th-6th day of the offensive. The counterattack of the 3rd and 23rd Panzer Divisions was held back, but a heavy price had to be paid. Of the eight tank brigades that provided direct infantry support to the northern strike force, six (57, 90, 36, 13, 133rd and 6th Guards) were involved in covering the left flank. The 84th Tank Brigade, assigned to operate jointly with the 3rd

guards cavalry corps, suffered heavy losses during the offensive and consisted of only 13 tanks.

The offensive of the southern shock group - the 6th Army of General Gorodnyansky - also developed successfully, but not where it was required. It was necessary to strike to the north, but it turned out to be an offensive directly to the west. It cannot be said that both groups did not move at all in the intended direction. But where the operation plan demanded, they advanced for a few kilometers, and where they didn't need to, for tens of kilometers. As a result, the encirclement plan of the 6th Army collapsed right on the first day of the offensive, and it is difficult to say why it continued. Probably, our command wanted to exhaust and bleed the opposing German divisions. In fact, the exact opposite happened. In addition, our generals missed an opportune moment to bring tank corps into battle. Formally, there was a reason - the infantry did not reach the planned lines. However, it is precisely in such cases that the commander must assess the situation and make a decision. The Hungarian 108th Light Infantry and the German 62nd Infantry Divisions were defeated, one more small effort and the German front would have simply collapsed. If not quite a blitzkrieg, then something reminiscent of it would have happened. Alas ... However, all this is not surprising. Our command prepared the offensive so thoroughly that on May 12 the infantry of the 6th Army operated without air support. And this is in the presence of almost 500 aircraft!

The state of command of Army Group South by May 14 could be described as panic. Background bok
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neiled Halder and expressed doubts about the possibility of stopping the Soviet offensive with an attack by the Kleist group from the south:

"A Kleist attack with the available forces is unlikely to bring the expected success. Kleist, with whom I have just spoken, thinks that the attack [325] will be successful if the opponent does not attack first. [...] I cannot take this decision upon myself" (Vosk E. wop. Or.si. R.477).

As an alternative to an attack on the southern front of the Barvenkovsky ledge, von Bock suggested withdrawing 3-4 divisions from the Kleist front and using them to eliminate the gap south of Kharkov. In fact, the offensive of the Southwestern Front put the Friederikus on the brink of a complete fiasco. But Halder took a risky decision and convinced Hitler that he was right. The attack on the southern front of the Barvenkovsky ledge was to begin as planned.

The Soviet command acted very badly. The complete passivity of the Southern Front made it possible to withdraw part of the forces of the 1st Panzer Army of Kleist from there and transfer them to Kharkov. That would be where to tie down the enemy, and not near Vyazma and Rzhev! And yet it was no longer 1941, although this was expressed primarily in the weakness of the Germans.

The easiest way to deal with the actions of the Germans against the northern shock group advancing in the Murom region, because here everything came down to a simple squeeze of the Soviet troops from the territory occupied by them during the offensive. First, Paulus managed to stop the advance of the 21st and 28th armies by launching a counterattack. However, for some unknown reason, he acted exactly as the Soviet generals always acted - the 3rd and 23rd Panzer Divisions hit the 28th Army directly in front. When an offensive was launched on May 19 to eliminate the wedging, the blows were delivered again right in the center instead of trying to cut the wedge. The headquarters of the KhUP corps tried to do something in this regard. A consolidated detachment of three regiments pulled from different divisions carried out a sluggish attack under the base of the northern face of the penetration and even advanced a couple of kilometers, but that was it. The Germans could not count on anything more serious here.

Events developed much worse in the south. Actually, it is precisely the Soviet generals who are to blame for this, who drove parts of the two armies into a trap. It was clear that our offensive was not successful and that the armies were in a dangerous position, since they themselves had climbed into a deep

bag. But no conclusions followed. General Gorodnyansky could not decide on anything at all, he just sat and waited for what the enemy would do. And waited.

K. On May 17, the German troops completed the regrouping and went on the offensive at dawn. However, these actions were far from being as organized as our historians are now trying to present, arguing that "everything was decided in advance." In the first days, the offensive on the northern front was only indicated, since Paulus had only infantry units there. The only blow was delivered from the south by the forces of the SH Panzer and XU Army Corps. The same accursed lack of strength forced the Germans to launch a "half blitzkrieg", but the Soviet generals failed to neutralize even half. By noon, the defense of the Soviet 9th Army was broken through, and German tanks advanced 20 kilometers. Here is what A. Isaev writes about this:

"Soon, having broken the resistance of the regiment of the 333rd Infantry Division, the 1st Mountain Jaeger Division occupied most of Barvenkovo. The advancing formations of the KhTs of the army corps reached the area of Dolgenkaya already by 14.00 on the first day of the offensive. It is indicative that one of the German shock groups launched the offensive from the area of Slavyansk held by the Germans in the winter of 1942. The city was one of those points that needed to be taken "head on" and uselessly bypassed. In Dolgenkaya, the advancing Germans destroyed the communication center. As a result, there was no communication between the headquarters of the Southern Front and the 9th Army until 24:00 on May 17.

Will we believe? I would suggest some doubt. Again, the map plays a major role as a catalyst for doubt. Before the start of the offensive, the 1st Mountain Jaeger Division was separated from Barvenkovo by about 15 kilometers. The only reasonable way to explain what Isaev said is that the mountain rangers simply drove up to Barvenkov

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cars, dismounted and took the city. 15 kilometers and 8 hours of offensive... Heavy fighting to break through the defense at the starting line and storm the city in this time period

fit badly.

Worst of all was the utter disunity between the Soviet headquarters at the highest levels. The 6th Army was completely unaware of what was happening in the 9th, the headquarters of the Southern Front was generally in a state of blissful hibernation. And when after that they begin to prove to me that our troops were completely provided with walkie-talkies, the only thing I want to ask is: why was there no connection?!

The fact is that it was on May 17 that General Gorodnyansky finally decided to put his tank corps into action and dealt a new blow, getting even deeper into the bag. His tanks advanced 15 kilometers in the direction of Merefa, the infantry trying to keep up as much as possible. The impression was created that the German and Soviet commands were acting according to a single plan.

Our command realized it only in the evening, when the situation became critical. In this area, there were significant reserves, which for some reason also maintained neutrality in the outbreak of battles. It remains unknown why the commander of the 9th Army, General Kharitonov, did not consider it necessary to report on the German offensive to the headquarters of the Southern Front and the South-Western direction. He could try to use his power reserve divisions, but this is already beyond the bounds of admissibility.

The Germans were also advancing in a rather strange way. Coming out to Petrovskaya, [the 3rd tank corps suddenly turns sharply to the left and starts moving parallel to the starting line: A formal explanation for this can be found, because the Soviet 2nd cavalry corps struck at the flank of the advancing grouping. But the infantry is designed to repel such blows! It always provides the flanks of an advancing tank group. The advance of the Germans to the north in the period from 19 to 21 May slowed down. On the northern front, calm still reigned. Our command-

The vanity was given two precious days, but it succeeded.

_ use this gift

On May 22, General Breit, commander of the 3rd Panzer Corps, who came to his senses, resumed the offensive to the north. By this time, units of the 3rd and 23rd Panzer Divisions, which had previously operated against the northern penetration, arrived on the northern front. Note, units, but not the divisions themselves. By the evening of May 22, German groupings meet near Bairak and Glazunovka. The ring is closed. Encircled were: 5 rifle divisions of the 57th Army (14th Guards, 99, 150, 317 and 351st), 8 rifle divisions of the 6th Army (41, 47, 103, 248, 253, 266, 337 and 411th), 2 rifle divisions of the army group L.V. Bobkin (270th and 293rd), 6 cavalry divisions of the 2nd and 6th cavalry corps (38, 62, 70, 26, 28 and 49th), 2 tank corps, 5 separate tank brigades, artillery Russian, engineering units and various support units.

Only now Marshal Timoshenko is waking up. In order to break through the encirclement on May 23, a consolidated tank corps was hastily created, which was to act jointly with the 38th Army. However, the offensive begins only on May 25. The progress of the hull is measured in hundreds of meters, it's good, the losses are not too great yet. On May 26, the corps came under a joint attack by Soviet and German aircraft and stood still all day. However, it was on this day that a group under the command of Major General Kuzmin, commander of the 21st Tank Corps, broke through to meet the corps in the Chepel area. This breakthrough was led by the battle-hardened 5th Guards Tank Brigade. The tanks were lined up in a "bell" formation (which the Germans thought of only at Kursk). But out of 22,000 soldiers, only 5,000 broke through. Practically all the tanks of this group perished.

On the same day, May 26, another group formed around the 23rd Tank Brigade broke through. This could be rejoiced, if not for one "but". All the tank units left the cauldron, and now the remaining infantry was doomed.

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Our commanders failed to organize a larger breakthrough.

In the meantime, the German command hastily strengthened the encirclement by transferring additional forces there - the 22nd Panzer, 68th and 125th Infantry Divisions. The last successful attempt to get out of the encirclement took place on the night of May 27-28, when about 6,000 more people came out to the same Csepel. The total losses of the Red Army were once again very high. They amounted to about 270,000 men, of which 207,000 were captured. The loss of 652 tanks, 1,646 guns and 3,278 mortars is recognized, but at the same time there is a reservation that "it is not possible to establish the loss of weapons and equipment due to the lack of documents for a number of formations and units."

Unfortunately, our commanders, instead of organizing a breakthrough with all their might, leaving behind the doomed rearguards, indulged in unbridled fantasies. So, "more interesting options appeared at the headquarters of the South-Western direction. For example, there was an idea to break through the weakened front of the Chuguev salient. May 21 K.S. Moskalenko was even ordered to regroup and launch an offensive north of Chuguev. However, due to the impossibility of concentrating the strike force on time, this plan had to be abandoned.

The defeat of the armies of the Southwestern Front was decided to be blamed on the Germans, who concentrated their forces in a completely unexpected place. Our command and reconnaissance did not foresee at all the possibility of an enemy offensive in the southern direction. They were waiting for him, you see, in the Voronezh region with a subsequent bypass of Moscow from the east. However, when the Germans struck there, they also failed to repel it.

After recovering from the surprise, the Germans nevertheless proceeded to implement their own plan for the summer offensive, which received the code name "Blau". It is interesting to note that at first this plan bore the name "Seidlitz" - in honor of the famous cavalry general. However, Hitler, apparently remembering the deplorable fate of the Barbarossa,

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401.4. + 101st Light Light Division

4.665. > 4th mountain infantry division

1 1..6.) - - your Slovak motorized division

9 #.) * 9th Italian Infantry Division

BK.(V.) 5 Romanian steel division

1.8. (6g.) ——— Oretsky infantry regiment

"6.0" - torn diva "Great Germany" { bgovoalenaiah } \$\$... M/" — 5- motorized diva SS `Wikik" {UIKAH"
2A.(Nil.) - 2nd century vryka

284sd. 284th Infantry Division

92 cd. 32nd Cavalry Division

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Operations Blau and Clausewitz

I decided not to risk loud names any more and again turned to the "colored". After all, there were already the Weiss plan, the Gelb plan, the Roth plan, and all THESE "every hunter wants to know ..." ended successfully for the Wehrmacht. This is probably why the Seydlitz turned into a blue Blau. However, its continuation remained under the loud surname of Clausewitz, although the famous military theorist had to turn over in his grave, looking at the desecration of the basic principles of military science, which this plan turned into.

On June 28, the German army went on the offensive with the forces of the Weichs army group, which included the German 1st Panzer and 2nd Armies, as well as the Hungarian 2nd Army. It was not from a good life that unreliable allies began to appear in the directions of the main blows. In this regard, the lamentations of many Soviet historians that our armies by the summer of 1942 were staffed with green recruits do not look quite convincing. The position of the Germans was no better, if not worse. Our generals have not yet enlisted the help of "valiant

Mongolian divisions", but the German ones were forced to rely on the Hungarians, Italians "and various other Swedes".

The blow was struck on the left flank of the Bryansk Front. In the first echelon of the enemy attacked 3 tank, 1 infantry and 1 motorized divisions. Motorized and HEUSCH tank corps, they were opposed by only 3 rifle divisions. Air support was provided by Wolfram von Richthofen's most powerful and most experienced air corps in matters of cooperation with US ground forces. After a tense battle of the KhGUSH, the corps managed to break through the Soviet defenses at the junction of the 13th and 40th armies, to advance 8-15 km to the east.

To fend off the emerging threat, the reserves of the Bryansk Front and several tank corps of the Southwestern Front and the Stavka reserve were sent to the breakthrough site. In total, they numbered over 1000 armored vehicles, and they would be quite enough not only to repel the offensive, but also to defeat the shock group.

von Weichs' roving. However, once again the picture that stuck in my teeth was repeated. Formally, a special tank group of Lieutenant General Fedorenko was created. The Germans had half as many tanks, but our corps attacked one by one. The 16th Panzer Corps was the first to enter the battle on June 29, the next day the 1st Panzer Corps appeared on the battlefield. The 4th and 17th Panzer Corps arrived even later.

It was assumed that the blow would be inflicted on the flank and rear of the advancing divisions of the XE / VIII tank corps. If this had happened, then the German offensive, of course, would have been thwarted. But it is not enough to conceive a good plan, you still need to implement it. Our generals got another frontal strike, culminating in another defeat of our troops. The explanation was found very quickly, and it satisfies even modern historians. The Germans used new equipment - T-[U] tanks and ZiS-SHE self-propelled guns, armed with long-barreled 75-mm guns. Yes, they did. As part of the German divisions of the first echelon, there were exactly 36 such tanks. For reference: there were still 67 units of terribly formidable T-P tanks in them. The production of the 5uS-SHE assault gun began in March 1942, and in 3 months the Germans stamped as many as 109 of them. Do you think that all these self-propelled guns ended up near Bryansk to the last? -

It seems that only the former chief of staff of the Bryansk Front, General Kazakov, had the courage to write: "The real reasons for the failure, in my opinion, were in something else: inability." Marshal Vasilevsky writes the same thing, although in a more veiled form:

"After this, is it possible to say that the Headquarters ignored the Bryansk Front? The forces and means that he had at his disposal were not only sufficient. in order to repel the enemy offensive that had begun in the Kursk-Voronezh direction, but also in general to defeat the Weichs troops operating here. And if, unfortunately, this did not happen, it was only because the front command failed to organize a massive attack on

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flanks of the main enemy grouping, and the Headquarters and the General Staff, apparently, did not help him much in this. Indeed, as events have shown, tank corps, when repulsing an enemy offensive, were brought into action in parts, and not so much to solve active tasks of destroying an enemy that had broken through, but to close the gaps that had formed in the defense of our combined arms armies. The commanders of the tank corps (major generals of the tank troops M.E. Katukov, N.V. Feklenko, M.I. Pavelkin, V.A. Mishulin, V.M. Badanov) did not yet have sufficient experience, and we they were of little help with their instructions and advice. The tank corps behaved indecisively: they were afraid to break away from the defending infantry of the combined arms armies, in connection with which, in most cases, they themselves acted according to the methods of the rifle troops, not taking into account their specifics and their capabilities "...

However, counterattacks were quickly forgotten. On June 30, the 6th Army of Paulus went on the offensive. She struck from the Volchansk region and immediately broke through the defenses at the junction of the 21st

28th army. The 29th motorized division began to move north in the direction of Stary Oskol, where the 16th motorized division of von Weichs was already approaching. Another cauldron was planned, in which the 21st and 40th armies could be. However, the commander of the 21st Army, General Danilov, immediately decided to withdraw troops, ordering the 13th Tank Corps to cover this withdrawal.

The 28th Army also began to retreat, but not to the east, but to the south. The army commander, General Ryabyshev, intended to stop the Germans with a counter (and what else?) strike from the 23rd tank brigade. I'm already tired, but I have to quote again:

"The 6th and 113th tank brigades launched an offensive without having information about the enemy forces, without organizing interaction with infantry, artillery and aviation.

As a result of such disorganization, the tanks were met from ambush by active enemy artillery fire in cooperation with aviation, which immediately disrupted the battle order of our advancing tanks.

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Thank God, the legs managed to carry away. However, the 40th Army was less fortunate than the 21st and 28th. Part of the divisions of its left flank was surrounded in the area of Stary Oskol and was destroyed, the encirclement was closed on July 3, 1942. By the way, remember this date. It was the end day of the last successful German blitzkrieg attempt in Russia. Of course, later there were breakthroughs of tank units, and even boilers appeared (though less and less often and smaller), but this happened spontaneously, and was not planned in advance. I wonder if it can be considered a mere coincidence that it was at the same time that the last successful German blitz operation in North Africa ended? On June 21, Tobruk was taken by a swift attack, after which the blitzkrieg in North Africa bogged down.

Having closed the ring, von Weichs' tanks moved towards Voronezh. An interesting situation arose: outwardly, Stalin's fears were justified, who was afraid that the Germans would strike in the south and take a deep bypass of Moscow from the east. And the actions of von Weichs looked like the beginning of just such an operation, although the Germans had nothing of the kind even in their minds. In accordance with their plans, they intended to turn south along the Don in order to reach Stalingrad and move to the Caucasus. .

To prevent the capture of Voronezh, the Stavka sent three more reserve armies (the Red Army's strength in reserves!) and General Lizyukov's 5th Panzer Army to this direction. It was planned to strike at the KhGUSH tank corps on July 5, but by the indicated date, only Rotmistrov's 7th tank brigade arrived at the starting line. The remaining two corps were delayed, as they were transported by rail, although the distance did not exceed 100 kilometers. On the one hand, the decision is strange, since it led to a big loss of time. And on the other hand, if you remember that the losses of our tank corps during the marches too often exceeded the combat ones, you will involuntarily think: is it strange?

As a result, the offensive began only on the morning of July 6

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a blow from Rotmistrov's corps. The next day, the 11th Tank Corps and the 19th Separate Tank Brigade entered the battle. In the course of fierce battles, the Germans managed to be pushed a little, and only on July 10 did the 2nd Panzer Corps go on the offensive. Everything, as usual, is scattered blows with outstretched fingers. And the result was the usual: out of 641 tanks available on July 6, only 142 tanks remained in the army by July 17. True, 158 cars could still be repaired, but this was little consolation. Our generals did not get tired of proving that they were no match for the German panzer generals, although you could not deny their courage. On July 25, 1942, the commander of the 5th tank army, A.I. Lizyukov personally led the attack, intending to make a breach in the enemy defenses near the village of Sukhaya Vereika and withdraw a unit belonging to his army from the encirclement. KV A.I. Lizyukov was hit, and the commander of one of the

vyh Soviet tank armies died. Guderian also liked to command the battle from the front line, but he did it from the control vehicle, and not from the line tank. And yet, although the Germans achieved major successes during Operation Blau, the events of 1941, when entire Soviet fronts disappeared without a trace, were not repeated.

On July 7, the Germans launched Operation Clausewitz. Apparently, Hitler forgot, if he knew at all, that from 1812 to 1814 Karl Clausewitz was a colonel in the Russian army. Ambiguous, you see, the name for the operation against the Russian army. On the same day, Army Group South was divided in two: into Army Group A and Army Group B. One of them was supposed to advance on Stalingrad, the second - on the Caucasus.

The goal of Operation Clausewitz and one of the points of Directive No. 41 was to encircle and destroy the main forces of the Southwestern Front. The fulfillment of this task by the enemy was carried out by delivering two strikes: one from the area south of Voronezh by the forces of the 4th Panzer and 6th Armies of Army Group B and the other from the area of Slavyansk, Artemovsk by the forces of the 1st Tank Army of the Army Group "A" in the general direction to Millerovo. But along the way

plans

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Hitler changed. Suddenly he decided to try to destroy in general the entire southern wing of the Soviet front, cutting it off to the north of the Don with a general attack on Rostov. On July 11, he signs directive No. 43, which most of all resembles a fantasy novel from the genre of alternative history. There was also the landing of amphibious assault forces in Anapa and Novorossiysk, and the capture of the oil fields of the North Caucasus ... Everything was there, except for the forces necessary for this.

The Germans tried to arrange another pocket for the troops of the Southwestern Front, but failed. XX. the tank corps cut off the 9th and 38th armies from the east, and the 3rd tank corps from the 1st tank army wedged between the 9th army of the then Southwestern Front and the 37th army of the Southern Front. On July 15, 1942, the German 14th Panzer Division of the Sh Panzer Corps established contact with the units of the KhG Panzer Corps advancing towards it, and the encirclement ring around the troops of the 9th, 38th and part of the forces of the 24th However, just on that day, the Headquarters gave the order for a general withdrawal beyond the Don, so the encircled armies, not trying to defend themselves much, broke through the still weak encirclement and retreated, although not without losses. As early as July 13, "B" reported sadly to the OKH that "the enemy had broken through to the east and southeast and again moved south in strong units." Von Bock directly blamed the failure of the operation on the Berlin strategists, stating that the strike force had a strong center and weak flanks and that in such a case one cannot rely on any boilers. He was no longer forgiven for this, and on July 13, Field Marshal von Bock was removed from his post as commander of Army Group B. He was replaced by Field Marshal von Weichs. The official reason is the loss of momentum of the offensive and the too long delay in the Voronezh region, but this resignation can be considered an indirect recognition of the relative (only relative!) failure of Operation Blau. Hitler would later say to Keitel:

"He (von Bock) loses (Voronezh) 4-5 days because of this. And this at a time when every day is precious in order to surround and destroy the Russians; he continues to sit there,

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on top, with the four best divisions, primarily the 24th Panzer Division and the Grossdeutschland Division, clinging to Voronezh. I also said - do not press, if you meet resistance anywhere, go south to the Don. The decisive thing is to move as quickly as possible to the south, so that we can really capture the enemy in pincers. So no, this person does exactly the opposite. Then this trouble came - several days of bad weather, as a result of which the Russians unexpectedly gained 8-9 days, during which they were able to get out of the loop.

The further advance of the Germans to the south towards Rostov did little for them. They slammed the second boiler, but it was empty, since the troops of the Southern Front managed to

retreat. Von Weichs' order "not to allow the enemy to retreat to the east and go south across the Don" remained unfulfilled. |

By July 24, the German armies reached the banks of the Lower Don for a long distance and captured several bridgeheads on the left bank of the river. And on July 25, the Wehrmacht jumped into the abyss, launching an offensive from these bridgeheads. The basis of military art has always been considered to be concentrated

`Nie forces and create superiority in one area. German

some offensive in the summer of 1942 ran counter to this principle. Not only did the German army try to attack in two divergent directions at once: to the east and south, the second offensive also took on a more than strange character. Look at any map of hostilities south of the Don. You will see that the German troops are gradually unfolding like the petals of a fan, dispersing in different directions. That is, not only the two groups of armies were not concentrated on one most important direction, so, in addition, one of them turned into some kind of amorphous mass, starting to operate in separate divisions, if not in general regiments.

The lack of forces led to the fact that mobile tank formations were transferred from one direction to another, an atmosphere of chaos and nervousness was created, because the German generals did not know what, in fact, forces

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they can count on upcoming operations. For example, in mid-July, not a single tank corps remained in the Stalingrad direction. But then, on July 23, 1942, Hitler signed another fateful directive No. 45, which ordered the withdrawal of two mobile formations from Army Group A and transfer them to Army Group B to continue the offensive on Stalingrad. At the same time, the motorized division "Grossdeutschland" was withdrawn from Army Group A to the reserve. The 11th Army, which, according to Directive No. 43, was supposed to land in Taman and assist the offensive in the Caucasus, was ordered to go to Leningrad along with all heavy artillery. Having received Directive No. 45, Field Marshals List and Weichs were forced to comply with it and began to transfer troops from the Caucasian direction to Stalingrad. In the period from 23 to 25 July, from the composition of Army Group "A" to Army Group "B" were transferred the control of the HJU and HEUSH tank corps and two tank divisions - the 23rd and 24th. They were soon followed by the 14th and 16th Panzer and 29th Motorized Divisions. The 8th Italian Army was also sent to Army Group B from the Donbass. In addition, the KhG army corps of the 17th Army was withdrawn to the reserve of the main command and also sent on foot to the Stalingrad direction. The entire southern flank of the Germans is shaking as if in a fever.

Army Groups A and B were advancing at right angles to each other. In fact, two independent operations began in different directions, despite the fact that the Germans had enough forces for a maximum of one. The targets of these operations were at a great distance. It couldn't lead to anything good. Blitzkrieg, always aimed at the destruction of enemy troops, degenerated into the capture of territory that did not have much value. Further worsening the situation of the Germans was the undeveloped communication system in these barren steppes. If during the offensive in central Russia they complained about bad roads, then there were none.

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Summary. In the summer of 1942, the Germans in the southern direction achieved serious successes, again due to the extremely unsuccessful, even helpless actions of the Soviet command. The attempted offensive near Kharkov, the first classic Soviet blitzkrieg, failed mainly for this reason. The actions of the Germans to eliminate the Barvenkovsky ledge were also not skillful enough. Still, General Paulus was accustomed to serving as chief of staff, not as commander of an army. But our generals acted even worse.

But as a result, the Germans failed to solve any of the assigned tasks, scattered their troops over a vast territory and stretched them beyond any communication limit. The catastrophe near Stalingrad was prepared by the plan of Operation Clausewitz. The summer of 1942 was also the end of the successful blitzkrieg operations performed by the German troops. After that, we see this tactical technique only in the performance of the Red Army, and their results for the enemy vary from a serious defeat to a complete and swift defeat.

Chapter 10 ANTIDOTE

When one reads descriptions of the rapid campaigns of panzer generals, there is a temptation to declare the blitzkrieg a kind of miracle weapon, a sword-treasurer in the hands of the newly appeared titans. In fact, this weapon misfired from the very first days of the war, but Guderian; Manstein, Mellenthin, Routh and others are very reluctant to remember their failures. But these failures were, and each of them.

Means of counteracting the blitzkrieg began to look for far away not immediately. At first, Guderian's theory was perceived as a kind of abstract logical construction, weakly connected with real combat operations. Well, how many theories were invented by the generals who found themselves out of work after the end of the world war? In addition, the inventions of the generator

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la Giulio Due, who preached the religion of heavy bombers, looked more attractive. It seemed tempting to win without laying hands on it. Western theorists realized it only after the defeat of Poland. A real panic flared up after the capitulation of France. But it turned out that the antidote to the blitzkrieg was far from easy to find. In any case, the British in North Africa did not succeed. The British generals changed one after another, the places of battles changed, but the result still turned out to be deplorable for the British.

If we take a closer look at the history of blitzkrieg, we will see that for the first time this tactic began to fail on the Eastern Front, although not immediately. As we already wrote, the big blitzkrieg failed miserably by the autumn of 1941, the Germans did not, and could not, win a lightning victory over the Soviet Union. But in the fall of 1942, for the first time, I found a scythe on a stone and at a small blitzkrieg. The failure of the Gaifun operation was due to completely different factors, what can we even talk about if Guderian was going to storm Tula with 20 tanks?! But the fighting in the foothills of the Caucasus showed that even full-blooded, well-trained tank divisions can be stopped. Although, for clarity, we will have to mention a few cases from later operations.

The first and most obvious way to counter the blitzkrieg - a deep breakthrough, encirclement, the interaction of all branches of the military - was to use the properties of the terrain. You can not even think about the rapid advance through the swamps, forests or ravines. The ideal terrain for a blitzkrieg is table-smooth plain with plenty of roads, preferably highways. Otherwise, the tank loses speed, and if the terrain abounds in natural cover, it becomes extremely vulnerable even to infantry. This is exactly what the Soviet troops used in the battles in the Caucasus. In this case, the Germans were simply forced to advance through unfavorable terrain - there was simply no other way to Baku oil. However, the question immediately arises: why did they drive the tanks forward? Or after a successful

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captivity on the Don, did the panzer generals unconditionally believe in the omnipotence of this weapon?

° However, there were cases when the attacker deliberately chose "anti-tank" terrain. We are talking about two operations of the German army in the Ardennes. The hills overgrown with dense forests are no better than the swamps in which the first "tigers" drowned near Leningrad. Tank columns can only move along narrow roads that can be counted on the fingers of one hand. And yet, in 1940, the Germans were successful. Why? Here we are dealing with one of

the most common myths of World War II. Let's reread the memoirs of the German generals themselves. And then we will see that the tanks did not break through the Ardennes. Everything was done by the infantry, and the tank corps were already advancing after it, and they immediately began to experience problems. Not from a good life, Guderian committed his divisions to battle in turn, one after another, and they began to operate already on the other side of the Meuse, after the capture of Sedan. And there the area was completely different. But it seems that the German generals themselves believed in the myth they created. Therefore, in 1944, they tried to attack with tank divisions in the same area. They had to make sure by their own example that forest areas were not suitable for the operation of tank units. The breakthrough degenerated into an advance in two "guts", which the Allies managed to stop, albeit not without problems. What development of success can we talk about if the captured area is shot through even not from long-range, but from tank guns?

On the other hand, the Byelorussian operation of 1944, when the Red Army was advancing through the terrain, probably even more difficult than the Ardennes, should serve as an example of a skillful choice of offensive routes. However, after this offensive, Army Group Center ceased to exist. Well, how the transition of the 6th Guards Tank Army through the ridges of the Greater Khingan was ensured, one can only admire.

The weather factor is no less important.

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If in the fall, during the rains, the roads turn into an impassable mess, then what kind of offensive can we talk about? By the way, we all remember Suvorov Rezun's charming commentary on the combat qualities of the "terrible" captured tanks 38 (I) and the photograph attached to it. Say, the Germans put them on logs so that during the night frost the tank would not freeze to the ground, otherwise, they say, the blitzkrieg weapon would be unable to move. Let's clarify, everything was almost like that, only a little bit different. The German generals were really afraid of frosts during the autumn thaw. The tanks sank in the mud along the axis of the wheels, and if frost hit at night, then the devil himself would not help them move on, but not because the tracks froze to the ground. The same General Routh gloomily mentions that for this reason he was forced to abandon almost two-thirds of his equipment - tanks, self-propelled guns, armored personnel carriers. In general, it's not difficult to think of a log under the tracks, but come on, not everyone succeeded. So the weather conditions can very effectively stop the blitzkrieg. By the way, the slush interfered with our tanks exactly to the same extent as the German ones, so you shouldn't hang all the dogs on the Panzerwaffe.

The essence of blitzkrieg tactics was the interaction of various branches of the armed forces. The most spectacular, of course, was the assistance of a dive bomber, the terrible L1-87, translated into Russian it was called "Shtuka" - an abbreviation for the German "Sturzkampflünoig". The plane howling with sirens is simply impossible not to notice. At times, air support was decisive, for example in France in the spring of 1940 or during the storming of Tobruk in 1942. But over time, German aviation lost air supremacy, this was especially noticeable on the Western Front. And then the panzer generals had to switch to night attacks or, as during Operation Wacht am Rhein, use non-flying weather.

Artillery support for the Germans did not matter much, since the same dive bombers received the nickname "flying artillery". Multi-day shelling of positions

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the enemy remained in the past, they were replaced by short fire raids. But artillery was of great importance at the stage of elimination of boilers. |

It was in order to ensure that the interaction was as effective as possible that the Germans began to ensure the formation of the so-called battle groups (Katr@girre). The battle group was a temporary formation of units of various branches of the military that were part of the division.

The core of the battle group was a tank or infantry regiment, which was attached to divisions of an artillery regiment, batteries of an anti-tank division, and companies of a sapper battalion. Often the battle group received at its disposal reinforcements attached to the division from the corps. The battle group was led by the regimental commander, and in the case of tank units, by the commander of an infantry brigade or tank regiment. Thus, the issue of interaction between troops was automatically resolved, orders to artillerymen and sappers were given by the commander of the combat group himself without filing requests to the commander of a division or corps. None of the Allies had thought of this before. The combat commands of the American tank divisions can serve as a kind of analogue, an analogue, but no more

Togo.

The support of other branches of the military was not so noticeable, but no less important. For example, one of the reasons for the failure of the German offensive near Kursk in 1943 was the weakness of the engineer units. The Germans lost dozens of tanks in our minefields, and it no longer mattered that a mine explosion was most often not fatal for a tank. A broken caterpillar or damaged rollers could be replaced, and the Germans did this because they had an excellent repair service. But there was one small "but" - these tanks were required here and now, and not tomorrow and somewhere else. By the way, the Soviet commanders near Kursk skillfully took advantage of this, ordering to shoot the German sappers who were engaged in demining. Not from a good life, the Germans began to use dive bombers for demining (by the way, here is another unexpected example of interaction with

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aviation!) and exploding Goliath wedges. But neither one nor the other option could replace the work of sappers. |

Of course, the Allies tried to find a tactic that would dispel the curse of blitzkrieg, but did not particularly succeed in this until the very end of the war. The idea of static defense in the style of the First World War collapsed first, because, in fact, the sting of the blitzkrieg was directed against it. The Polish General Stanisław Maczek, commander of the 10th Motorized Cavalry Brigade, based on his own deplorable experience, prepared a large memorandum on the topic "what is blitzkrieg and how to deal with it." He gave the document to the French, but they did not even bother to read "the fabrications of some Pole." You will laugh, but the Germans captured this memorandum among other documents of the French General Staff in a package that was never opened!

There is nothing surprising in the fact that the French were helpless in the fight against blitzkrieg. General Weygand put forward a proposal for a defense in depth, consisting of separate strong points. But after all, the enemy could easily bypass them, destroying them one by one with heavy artillery fire, which was exactly what the Red Army did in Manchuria in 1945, breaking into the Japanese defenses.

However, during the fighting in the same France, attacks by the British 1st Tank Brigade and the French 4th Tank Division (de Gaulle) on the flank of the advancing Germans led to a serious crisis, which was resolved only by Luftwaffe strikes. At the same time, numerous frontal attacks by Soviet tank units on the advancing German divisions only led to numerous senseless losses. The most reliable way to stop the blitz operation was to hold the flanks of the breakthrough, turning it into a small intestine that could be cut off by a blow to the flank, as the Germans did at Barvenkovo. An example of such a defense was demonstrated by our troops near Kursk, when the German front of the offensive rapidly narrowed as it advanced deep into the defense zone. It is only a pity that the counterattacks were delivered, to put it mildly, recklessly.

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The Americans suggested using large groups of self-propelled anti-tank guns to neutralize the breakthrough. Fortunately for themselves, they did not have time to test their theory in practice. I would love to look at the results of the battle with a battalion of "tigers" and, say, a regiment of self-propelled guns M-10 "Vulverin". I think that the tiger will sew the wolverine with one blow...

And now we will give an example of the successful neutralization of the strike of a tank corps, led by an experienced and skillful general of the Panzerwaffe. And he was opposed by far from superior forces.

As we have already said, the German command in the summer of 1942 was frankly confused. Capturing completely unnecessary territory for him, it clearly stretched communications beyond any limit. It was not for nothing that Army Group South had to be divided in half into Army Groups A and B, because the offensive was carried out along such widely dispersed directions that it was no longer possible to even dream of any coordination of actions. There were not enough forces, and the corps of the 4th Panzer Army frantically rushed either to the Stalingrad direction, then to the Caucasus, then again to Stalingrad. The German Godzilla tried to stretch its heads in exactly opposite directions. The attempted raid of the 16th motorized division on Astrakhan already looks completely inexplicable under any, even the most fantastic assumptions. And yet, quite large forces came out to the foothills of the Caucasus.

We are interested in events on the eastern sector of this new front. The fact that the Germans sought to capture Sochi, Gagra, Sukhumi, let their historians explain, because all this did not make much sense. Completely capture the Black Sea coast? Deprive the Black Sea Fleet of bases? What for? Did he interfere with the Germans? If you reread the history of the actions of this fleet, for the company made by the Red Banner, there will be a strong impression that it maintained neutrality in this war. This is for the Baltic Fleet, which defended Leningrad, or the Northern Fleet, which was exhausted in order to block the export of nickel ore from Petsamo.

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The main goal of the Germans in the Caucasus was Baku oil. And, along the way, not so important deposits in Maykop and Grozny. But the main goal of the offensive was Baku. However, for some incomprehensible reason, the main forces of Army Group A tried to break through to the Black Sea, while one KhGG was moved to Baku. tank corps.

True, the German command habitually believed that the enemy had brought all available forces to the front line, and if they were destroyed, the Caucasus itself would fall into the hands of Field Marshal List. Numerous defeats of the Germans did not teach anything, they did not increase sobriety or at least elementary caution in assessing the situation. A strange question - why drive tank divisions into the Caucasus Mountains - we no longer ask.

To further complicate their task, the Germans shuffled their divisions like a deck of cards. Mozdok (and potentially Baku) was attacked by the 3rd and 13th Panzer Divisions from the XXXXX Panzer Corps and the 111th and 370th Infantry Divisions from the III Army Corps. By the way, when on July 9, 1942, the XXXX Army Corps was renamed into a tank corps, the 3rd and 23rd tank divisions were included in its composition, but as we can see, the composition of the corps was changed for the August offensive. Maybe these improvisations influenced the coherence of actions? Unknown. However, it was in this direction that the Germans were taught a classic lesson in the fight against blitzkrieg, without missing a single point from those listed above. Only one thing is unclear: why did it take a year and a half of war and many millions of losses to master this wisdom?

On August 23, German troops launched an offensive against Mozdok and after 3 days of fighting managed to take the city. After that, they tried to seize the crossings over the Terek in order to provide a springboard for the offensive on Grozny. The attack in the direction of the Caspian coast, where the coastal road to Baku opened, was rather sluggish. Although Corps F was advancing there, one should not be deceived about its strength. - It was just a sabotage formation, formed

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a tank for operations on the territory of Iran and Iraq, in numbers and strength not exceeding a reinforced regiment.

The Soviet command seriously feared the loss of the main oil areas, and therefore tried to concentrate as many forces as possible here. However, at the beginning of the operation, a number of mistakes were made, primarily in the distribution of troops, but this did little to help the Germans.

September 2, German troops began crossing Terek and after stubborn fighting managed to create a bridgehead at Kizlyar. The next day, under the cover of fog, the Germans crossed the river and created another small bridgehead at the Bridgehead, but all attempts to expand the bridgeheads failed. The next day the Germans tried to deliver a stronger blow. Here is how Marshal Grechko talks about it:

"At 5 o'clock in the morning on September 4, the offensive of the Blitz group began - three days earlier than planned according to the plan. Obviously, the commander of this group, Colonel Liebendorf, insisted on this because of the disappearance of a German officer who knew about the offensive plan. Opponent quit. about 100 tanks into battle. At high speed, the tanks approached the foot of the Tersky Range. The climb became steeper, and then they were met with volleys from the height of the Cruiser. The very first shots fired from the cannons of the 47th Guards Fighter Battalion and the tanks standing in cover forced the enemy to turn back. But soon the enemy attack resumed. A fierce battle for the height of the Cruiser continued for several hours. Despite the fierce attacks of the enemy, the Soviet soldiers held this important position.

Now try to remember: how often do the memoirs of our generals and marshals mention the skillful use of the defensive properties of the terrain? Usually their stories are full of heroic sergeants and inspirational speeches of political officers. True, Grechko's memoirs are also guilty of this.

By the evening of September 5, the Germans managed to break through between the 8th and 9th infantry at the junction. brigades. They advanced

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forward for a distance of about 5 kilometers, but our infantry held the flanks of the breakthrough, and the Germans were stopped. For several days the Germans tried to break through the defenses, but to no avail. And then the Soviet command decided to launch a counterattack, and something happened that we have already seen dozens of times. A strike tank group was created as part of the 52nd tank brigade and the 75th separate tank battalion. A dashing attack, without reconnaissance, without artillery support, ended with the destruction of the attacking detachment. The brigade commander was handed over to the tribunal, but what has been done, as they say, cannot be corrected. However, the Germans managed to push back to the original bridgehead.

The commander of the XXG Corps was Geir von Schweppenburg, who had previously commanded the XXMU motorized corps, the main striking force of Guderian's army, and had vast experience in successful blitz operations. Therefore, it is clear that he relied on the striking power of tanks. He managed to squeeze the main forces of the 13th Panzer Division into the bridgehead and resumed the offensive on 3 September. However, the Caucasus was noticeably different from the central zone of Russia, and now other soldiers and commanders opposed von Schweppenburg. Progress was measured in hundreds of meters, and losses in hundreds of soldiers. For a German general, this was unacceptable. To the same [September 5, the Soviet troops struck back, pushing the Germans a few kilometers back. The front line fluctuated first to one side, then to the other.

On September 19, the Germans inflict a new powerful blow and capture a piece of land in the bend of the Terek. He has already abandoned the capture of Grozny, the capture of Ordzhonikidze is also becoming less and less likely. But all attempts to break through to Elkhoto fail. Heavy fighting bled the German infantry divisions dry, and the blitzkrieg mechanism was finally broken. However, the Germans had nothing to lose, and they continued fruitless attacks. The 7th SS Panzer Division "Viking" was ceremonially brought here, and on September 24 the offensive resumed. The Germans tried to break through the Elkhoto

company (along the valley along the Terek) in the direction of Ordzhonikidze.

But on September 27, the master of blitzkrieg von Schweppenburg received an exemplary lesson in the fight against blitzkrieg. To more accurately represent what is happening, we will tell you how these battles looked on both sides of the front line. First, the floor is given to A.A. Grechko:

"The entrance to the valley was defended by the 52nd Tank Brigade of Major V.I. Filippov, artillerymen of Major F. Dolinsky and one motorized rifle battalion. Tanks played the main role in this defense. Before dark, Filippov and Dolinsky agreed to cooperate. In view of the fact that the entrance to the valley at its narrowest point did not exceed 7 km, it was decided to create a number of anti-tank strongholds capable of independent defense. These points were echeloned along the valley to a sufficient depth. Each of them consisted of a tank ambush reinforced on the flanks by anti-tank guns and machine gunners.

The first line of PTOPs was supposed to cut the advancing echelons of enemy tanks into separate groups and inflict heavy damage on them. Therefore, it was the most durable. This line consisted of two tank companies, reduced to three ambushes, which were in fire communication with each other. The tanks were dug into the ground and stood in a line at an angle of 45 degrees to the line of advance of the enemy. Such a battle order allowed them to conduct simultaneous fire of the same force in several directions.

The second line of VETs was located two kilometers from the first. It included several KV tanks and anti-tank guns.

The third line was formed by separate tanks and anti-tank guns. German tanks were to be finished off on this line. The command post of the commander of the tank brigade was in the center of the PTOPs. Major Filippov personally looked through the whole area. This helped him in the future to clearly control the actions of tanks. Since the artillery battalion and individual guns were located near tank ambushes, Major Dolinsky decided to stay with the commander

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tank brigade. This made it easier for him to direct the artillery fire in accordance with the rapidly changing situation.

At dawn, after prolonged artillery and mortar fire on our battle formations, the Nazis threw into the attack 120 tanks, hundreds of paratroopers and more than a regiment of infantry on foot. The tanks moved at top speed in two groups of 50 and 70 vehicles, hoping to break into the valley on the move along the slopes that form it. Through binoculars, it was perfectly visible that 5-7 km from the front line of our defense, a large amount of artillery on tractors and vehicles with German infantry had accumulated on the roads. This was the second strike echelon, prepared by the enemy to develop success in depth.

As soon as the enemy tanks approached our defenses by 700-800 meters, artillery and mortars opened heavy fire on them. The first bursts of our machine gunners swept away machine gunners from fascist tanks. The artillery immediately shifted its fire to the infantry, which was following 300 meters behind the tanks. At the same time, several accurate volleys were fired by guards mortars. Their shells exploded in the midst of the fascist infantry. Having lost up to half of the composition, the Nazis began to retreat. Meanwhile, the tanks continued to stubbornly move forward, apparently believing that the infantry would soon overtake them. But at that moment, enemy tanks, machine gunners and infantry were at a far distance from each other. With any physical exertion, they could no longer break into our front line of defense together. This created a favorable environment for defeating the enemy piecemeal.

When the German tanks came close to the first line of PTOPs, all the fire fell on them. A minute later, six German tanks were already on fire on the battlefield and about ten stopped, lined with shells.

Since the left group of German tanks (50 vehicles) turned out to be closer to our positions, the main blow was struck first on it. It was so powerful that the surviving German vehicles turned back. Then the ambushes of the first line concentrated their fire on the right, stronger

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group (70 cars) of fascist tanks. Our tanks and guns of the rear strongholds were silent for the time being, not revealing themselves.

The German tankers of the first group, who were watching the destruction of the left group of tanks, apparently decided that as soon as they broke through our front line, they would come out of the tactical space, where there were no fire weapons.

At high speed they rushed forward, despite the fact that their path was littered with flaming and damaged cars. About 18 tanks broke through the first line of our defense. However, a minute later they came under fire from a new line of VETs. Because it only broke

a group of advancing tanks, the density of the fire impact on each of them turned out to be even higher here than in front of the forward edge. Soon seven more enemy vehicles burst into flames and several turned back. Four tanks tried to slip further into the valley. Two of them, having stumbled upon an ambush of our tanks, were hit, the rest turned back. |

Thanks to the coordinated actions of the tankers, artillerymen and infantrymen, the courage and heroism of the soldiers, 53 enemy tanks remained on the battlefield by nightfall. 10 guns of various calibers were also shot down, more than 800 enemy soldiers and officers were destroyed. Our tankers lost ten vehicles, five of which soon returned to service.

And now this is how the Germans saw it; describing the attack of the 4th Panzer Regiment of the 13th Panzer Division:

"At 0400, the battalion commander arrived at the observation post. The weather was rainy and very cloudy, so the infantry was ordered to attack at 0500 hours. Soon after the start of the movement, she came under heavy machine-gun fire from skillfully placed field fortifications, especially from the western end of the ridge. Therefore, the infantry, still in the lowland, was in mortal danger. The artillery preparation ended, and the tanks began to advance to the starting line for the attack. The 4th company began to climb the ridge, firing

numerous field

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new fortifications and anti-tank guns as soon as they appeared. The 5th and 6th companies went to the river, but were fired upon by numerous anti-tank guns and rifles, especially from the grove on the right.

At first, the enemy did not shoot very often. The attackers moved east step by step, breaking through the fortifications. The 4th company on the left flank was ordered to quickly move east up the slope to attack the artillery and mortar positions. At this moment, heavy artillery began to bombard the attack area, concentrating on three tank companies. The artillery fire was so dense that the 4th company moved back to take cover behind the ridge. |

Anti-tank guns and rifles fired more and more heavily on the 5th and 6th companies. The enemy was barely visible in the thick bushes. Well-camouflaged MK tanks. Sh were seen too late. The battle with enemy tanks proved too difficult because of the steep slope and heavy FIRE.

Despite the good work of our artillery, it was not possible to suppress the enemy artillery, as it was well camouflaged. She, as before, fired mainly at our tanks. Our infantry was also pinned to the spot.

... As Voznesenskaya's attacks on September 6, 1942 have already shown, the mountainous, rugged terrain is unsuitable for tanks. Since the tanks could not get through almost anywhere, the enemy was able to cover the few remaining sectors with mines and other anti-tank weapons. Since he had a lot of both, the losses in tanks were relatively high and could not justify the successes achieved and the territories captured. Increased wear and tear of equipment in mountainous areas caused numerous breakdowns."

As a result, by September 29, after four days of stubborn fighting, the German troops captured the Terek, Planovskoye, Elkhoto, Illarionovka, but could not advance further and were forced to go on the defensive. Blitz attempt

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the krieg failed in the wrong place. On September 30, General Geir von Schweppenburg was removed from command of the corps and sent to the reserve for a long time.

Summary. Very simple. Blitzkrieg is not a megaweapon. A skillful and determined opponent can always neutralize him.

Chapter 11 ON THE ROLE OF MICE IN THE FATE OF THE ARMY OF PAULUS

On November 19, 1942, something happened that simply had to happen. The Red Army launched a counteroffensive near Stalingrad, or, to be more precise, struck at the weak groups covering the flanks of the German 6th Army, hopelessly stuck among the ruins of the city. The vaunted German General Staff was not up to par for the first, but by no means the last time during the years of the Great Patriotic War. Even the first cursory glance at the map suggested exactly where the blow would be struck, because Paulus's army was just asking for an encirclement. Moreover, the Soviet command more or less clearly represented its extremely difficult position.

As we remember, one of the main components of a blitzkrieg is to hit the weak flanks of the enemy, but these weak flanks still need to be found. This is exactly what the reconnaissance battalions of the German panzer divisions did with the help of reconnaissance aircraft. At the strategic level, finding a weak point of defense turns into a difficult task. But in this case, the Germans themselves announced loudly: "It is here!" You could even say they screamed at the top of their lungs. The German 6th Army of General Oberst Paulus was advancing on Stalingrad, and its flanks were covered by the Romanian 3rd Army on the left, and the Romanian 4th Army on the right. Guess from one time where the weak flanks were?

However, what the hell are the flanks?! On the left was what the German historian Scheibert was talking about:

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Counteroffensive at Stalingrad

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Counteroffensive near Stalingrad

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"Particularly noteworthy is the unusually large length of the front line of Army Group B - almost 1300 km (this is the length of the air line from Geneva to Copenhagen). If we take into account such a large number of formations subordinate to the army group, it will be clear that there were a lot of even purely technical difficulties in command and control. To this should be added numerous problems of a coalition character, in this case we are talking about the joint actions of the troops of four nations. Relations between them just did not exclude difficulties. So, for example, it was impossible to place Romanian and Hungarian troops hostile to each other next to each other. This was the basis for placing the 8th Italian Army between the 2nd Hungarian and 3rd Romanian armies.

Well, only a lazy person will not hit such a section of the front. And there was no flank at all on the right, because immediately behind the positions of the Romanian 4th Army, "the boundless expanse of the steppes" began. That is, by November 1942, Paulus' 6th Army was something like a cannonball suspended in a vacuum. By the way, the very core was pretty rusty. On the one hand, tank formations were completely useless during urban battles, but on the other hand, they could be very useful for repelling possible enemy attacks. And how could Paulus repel these blows? Only the XU Panzer Corps of von Wietersheim, which included one fairly battered 16th Panzer Division. What kind of counterattacks from the depths of the defense could we talk about?

However, even in this sad preposition, the Germans proved to be a worthy adversary. Do you remember the story about the events on the Barvenkovsky ledge, when our headquarters learned about the German offensive only after two days, and generally began to react after three days?

Let us turn to the memoirs of the adjutant of the 6th Army, Colonel Adam. Yes, they were written in Soviet captivity and imbued with the delight of true enlightenment, but we will turn to the dry facts contained in these memoirs:

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"The phone rang furiously. I immediately woke up from sleep. Before I had time to pick up the phone, I heard a distant rumble. Hurricane fire, I thought. The duty officer reported: "Grevoga, Mr. Colonel! Immediately to the chief of staff! That was the beginning of the Soviet counteroffensive. The calendar sheet read: [November 9, 1942].

That is, when Paulus starts the offensive, the Soviet army commander finds out about it in two days, but when the attack on Paulus's army begins, he will know about it in 20 minutes. Amazing difference, isn't it?! There is one more nuance. How does Colonel Adam know about this offensive? By phone. At the same time, the call comes not only from the neighboring army, but also from the Romanian one. That is, for the Germans, conventional wire communication works much better than in the Red Army. It is simply meaningless to talk about the intricacies of radio communications in such cases. Don't you think that this short quotation answers many of the "mysteries" of 1941 and 1942?

What happened on the morning of November 19? In short, it was a radical turning point in the course of the Great Patriotic War. If long, then at 8.50 am after 12 hours and 20 minutes of artillery preparation for the attack, the troops of the Southwestern and Don fronts went on the offensive in order to encircle and destroy the German 6th Army, stuck in Stalingrad. No, Hitler was absolutely right when he warned his generals against fighting in large cities and did not allow them to storm Kyiv, Leningrad and Moscow. For the first time, the Germans betrayed this principle, and the matter ended in disaster for them.

We will not find out who exactly was the author of the Uranus plan and when it was drawn up. From my point of view, it is simply impossible. To rely solely on Zhukov's memoirs, I believe, would be extremely reckless. At the same time, the reasoning of A. Isaev, who puts the development of the plan at the end of September, can also be challenged, because Marshal Vasilevsky writes in his memoirs that the plan was already approved at the end of September. "Gogda

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In September, the main provisions of the plan for the offensive operation, which received the name "Uranus", were approved by the Headquarters of the Supreme High Command and the State Defense Committee," he writes. Let's leave this question open, we shouldn't be engaged in a petty carve-up of the Stalingrad glory, it will be enough for everyone.

As already noted, the Soviet counteroffensive plan provided for strikes in converging directions with the aim of encircling and then destroying a large grouping of enemy troops operating near Stalingrad. In the northern sector, the main blow was planned by the forces of the shock group of the Southwestern Front as part of the 5th Tank Army under the command of Lieutenant General P.L. Romanenko and the 21st Army under the command of Major General I.M. Chistyakov. Advancing from the bridgeheads southwest of Serafimovich and from the Kletskaya area, these troops were to break through the defenses of the Romanian 3rd Army and, with their mobile formations, rapidly develop the offensive to the southeast in the general direction of Kalach.

To quickly support the actions of the strike group from the west and south-west, part of the forces of the Southwestern Front - the troops of the left flank of the 1st Guards and the right-flank formations of the 5th Tank Army had the task of delivering an auxiliary strike and creating an external front to encircle the enemy grouping. On the third day of the operation, these troops were to reach the line from Veshenskaya to Bokovskaya and further along the Chir River to Verkhne-Chirskaya in order to prevent possible enemy counterattacks.

The troops of the Don Front delivered two auxiliary strikes: part of the forces of the 65th Army - Commander Lieutenant General P.I. Batov - from the bridgehead near Kletskaya to the southeast in the direction of Vertyachiy (Kletskaya, Venets, Rodionov, Vertyachiy) and the forces of the right flank of the 24th Army - Commander Major General I.V. Galanin - from the Kachalinskaya area along the left bank of the Don to the south, also in the general direction to Vertyachiy. The actions of these armies were aimed at encircling the enemy troops in the small bend of the Don and cutting them off from the main enemy grouping in the area of Stalingrad. Connect

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division and part of the 66th Army - Commander Major General A.S. Zhadov, who fought north of Stalingrad, received the task of tying down the opposing enemy by active actions. |

The troops of the shock group of the Stalingrad Front (51st, 57th and 64th armies) were to launch an offensive on the Ivanovka-Lake Barmantsak front in a north-western direction towards Sovetsky, Kalach and, during the offensive, unite with the troops of the South-Western Front. At the same time, the 51st Army of Major General N.I. Trufanova struck from the area of lakes Sarpa, Tsatsa and Barmantsak, and the 64th Army, together with the right-flank formations of the 57th Army, Major General F.I. south.

The 62nd Army had the task of continuing to pin down the enemy forces in the city, the 28th Army, the army commander, Lieutenant General V.F. Gerasimenko, was to cover the Astrakhan direction.

An interesting feature of the Uranus plan should be noted. In addition to the large cauldron into which it was planned to drive the main forces of the 6th Army, the Soviet command was going to arrange several smaller cauldrons for the enemy. The main role was assigned to the 21st Army of the Southwestern Front. Together with the 5th Panzer Army, it was supposed to encircle the 3rd Romanian Army, and then encircle the corps of the German 6th Army, located on the right bank of the Don. The troops of the Don Front should have helped her in this.

The offensive developed quite successfully from the very beginning. Some authors regret that bad weather prevented Soviet aircraft from striking German positions, and our armies were forced to confine themselves to artillery preparation. But Wolfram von Richthofen also writes about the same thing with undisguised bitterness. If we recall the events of the Kursk

battle, when the superiority of Soviet aviation was even greater, it can be assumed that the Germans had a little more reason to regret.

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On the offensive sector of the 5th Panzer Army, the resistance of the Romanians was not broken immediately, so the army commander decided to bring the success development echelon into battle. The 1st and 26th tank corps broke into the enemy defenses, and in the afternoon the 8th cavalry corps was introduced into the gap. The advance of the army on the first day was about 18 kilometers. Yes, it was less than planned, but much more successful than all previous attempts by the Red Army.

In addition, the 1st Panzer Corps near Peschanoe quite unexpectedly ran into the German 22nd Panzer Division and was unable to defeat it on the move. Soviet intelligence failed to timely detect the presence of the 22nd Panzer Division of the enemy (we are not at all surprised by this), so the collision with it in the Peschanoe area turned out to be unexpected. No opponents, except for the Romanians, were expected to meet here.

Actually, this meeting was unexpected for the Germans. This division was considered the reserve of the army group and, on its own initiative, was not going to participate in any battles. Counterattacks were to be delivered by others. On November 19, at 9:00 a.m., the commander of the XLVSH corps, Geim, called the headquarters of Army Group B and demanded that his tank corps be urgently moved in a northeasterly direction towards Kletskaya. Geim motivated his decision by the fact that from the side of Kletskaya there was a real danger to the rear of the 6th Army. Army Group Chief of Staff von Sonderstern agreed with the corps commander. At 0930, the corps began its march to Kletskaya, in the direction of the auxiliary strike of the Southwestern Front. However, at 10.45 Geim's corps received a new order, this time from the command of the ground forces: "The offensive should be carried out not to the northeast, but to the northwest." KHUSH Corps was to move to the bridgehead at Serafimovich. The command of the army group made the right decision and sent its strongest reserve to the direction of the main attack of the Soviet troops. However, "strong" is too bold a word. The shock group of the corps consisted of one
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own tank division - 13th. The 22nd was handed over to him only in December. That is, the Germans, in confusion, did the same thing that our generals did many times - they counterattacked in scattered, weak groups. The result, of course, turned out exactly the same. Here is how Friedrich von Mellenthin describes it:

"After a conversation with Zeitzler, I received more detailed information about the situation in the so-called "operations room". On November 19, Russian troops, consisting of three tank corps, two cavalry corps and twenty-one rifle divisions, went on the offensive from the bridgehead in the Kremenskaya area. They broke through the positions of the Romanians and created a gap about thirty kilometers wide. The 48th Panzer Corps, stationed behind the Rumanian 3rd Army, counterattacked with the forces of the 13th Panzer Division and the Rumanian tanks under its command, but was thrown back by an avalanche of Russian troops. The corps commander, General Geim, and his chief of staff, Colonel Friebe, were removed from their posts for indecision. A few days later I learned from Colonel von Oppeln of the 13th Panzer Division that his Panzer Regiment had been unable to move out in time because mice had gnawed through the external lighting wires on the tanks. However, in any case, the corps headquarters is not responsible for the delay, and this explains my appointment.

That's how the damned mice killed the army of Paulus!

But the Romanians were the first to suffer. On the third day of the offensive, the troops of the 5th Panzer and 21st Armies closed in and surrounded the main forces of the 3rd Romanian Army. General leadership of the encircled troops was entrusted to the commander of the 6th division, General Laskar.

The commander of the 3rd Romanian Army asked Antonescu for further action, but was told to obey the orders of Army Group B. Note that the Romanians also work quite normally, from the front line all the way to Bucharest.

The Romanians received the first offer to capitulate on November 22 at 22.30, but it was immediately rejected. This was followed by the performance "where a horse with a hoof, there is a cancer with a claw." RU

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The Myns tried to organize their own air bridge, and as many as 5 Romanian L1-52s landed in the location of the encircled troops, who delivered ammunition, food and took out 60 wounded. With this, the comedy in one act ended to the thunderous applause of the Soviet artillery. The encircled Romanians had no more than 40 shots per gun, many soldiers did not eat for three days. The commanders of the encircled Romanian formations, Generals Laskar, Mazarin and Sion, at a meeting in Golovsky, decided to break through to the west.

However, the Romanian plans were corrected by the advancing Soviet troops. Soon the headquarters of the 6th division was captured, General Laskar was taken prisoner, and organized resistance ended. Of course, separate detachments continued to fight until November 25, but this no longer mattered. The first pocket, which the Red Army arranged for the enemy, was liquidated almost without delay. 27,000 people were taken prisoner.

Not very confidently, but the Soviet commanders gradually mastered the art of blitzkrieg. The first daring and successful operation of such a plan was carried out by the commander of the 26th

General Rodin of the tank corps. He decided swiftly

throw to seize an important crossing over the Don at Kalach. For this, a special detachment of Lieutenant Colonel Filippov was created, which included only 5 tanks. But arrogance is second.

happiness.

This detachment moved deep into the enemy's location in cars with headlights on. The Germans mistook the tanks for their own, and they approached the crossing without hindrance. Having killed the guards of the crossing, the detachment seized it and organized the defense. Hans Doerr tries to explain the ease with which the crossing was captured: "Another Russian tank unit approached the bridge and captured it on the move without a fight, as the bridge guards mistook it for a German training unit equipped with captured Russian tanks, which often use this bridge. Yes, there were such units, but almost certainly the guards of the bridge were simply confused and fled, not bothering themselves with such complex reasoning. Later

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a year and a half of the war, we managed to repay the Germans with their own coin. We need to sometime start suddenly capturing bridges.

The movement of the southern half of the pincers (51st and 57th armies) began a day after the start of the offensive in the north. The reason was quite trivial - dense fog prevented the operations not only of aviation, but even of tank units. Interestingly, in accordance with pre-war doctrines, part of the tank units of the 4th and 13th mechanized corps were used to support the infantry. The reception turned out to be successful, although, perhaps, the 4th Romanian Army was not as resistant as the 3rd. In any case, in the south, the enemy defense collapsed almost instantly, and the 4th mechanized corps was introduced into the gap, after which the flywheel of the offensive began to spin automatically. An attempt by the German 29th motorized division to stop the advance of Soviet tanks was only a temporary success. In addition, this division never got to the place of the northern breakthrough, where it was intended to be transferred by the German

command.

In this regard, I would like to say that the arguments that the Germans could organize a reliable defense in the area of Lake Barmantsak, which could be a cemetery for Soviet tank units, are pure speculation. Let us once again recall the length of the German front near Stalingrad - 1300 kilometers. With what forces do you intend to maintain a "reliable defense" here? Or will the Lord God tell us that it is in this place and at this time that we should expect the strike of the Soviet armies?! Alas, Admiral Canaris clearly did not pull the role of the Lord, even with all his Abwehr troops. German intelligence, not for the first and far from the last time, failed to even approximately reveal the plans of the Soviet command. Yes, and the General Staff, as we said, was not up to par, because it was not too difficult to predict such a blow. And there is no contradiction in my words, because it is one thing to deduce a conclusion, but it is quite another thing to know exactly. However, the only way. born solving the German problem was a hasty retreat

ing from Stalingrad and reducing the length of the front line. But Hitler couldn't do that.

On November 22, the advancing Soviet troops captured Sovetskaya station, where large warehouses and repair shops of the German 6th Army were located. In addition, the railroad connecting the 6th Army with the rear was cut.

Although Paulus was informed of the beginning of the Soviet offensive almost immediately after it began, he did not immediately appreciate the size of the impending danger. On November 19, he informs the headquarters of the army group that the 6th Army intends to continue reconnaissance in battle within the city. But the German connection works perfectly even under such circumstances, and by the evening Paulus is forced to change his plan of action.

He immediately begins to act, apparently preparing for the very retreat to the west that we spoke about. Paulus withdraws his only mobile formation, the XU Panzer Corps, from the front north of Stalingrad and withdraws it to the west, ordering the army's western front to be formed. At the same time X] corps retreats to the south, occupying the positions of the XU tank. Thus, Paulus for some time delays the death of this corps, which the Soviet command intended to encircle and destroy north of Stalingrad.

However, the outwardly reasonable plan of Paulus also suffers from a lack of a sense of reality. The settlements Sukhanov, Skvorin, Yeruslanovsky listed in it are located on the western bank of the Don to the northeast of Kalach. Paulus was going to maintain the largest possible perimeter, including the area beyond the Don, without realizing that he no longer had the strength for this. He changed one very extended front for another, just as extended. Kalach itself became an important staging post for formations advancing to the new front. But he could keep the positions listed in the order of November 20 in only one case - by immediately leaving Stalingrad.

The unreality of this plan was emphasized by the unsuccessful attempts of the HUSH tank corps

stop the soviet

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step. It was simply crushed and thrown aside. It is not worth talking about the fate of the Romanian [th Panzer Division] that joined it.

In general, decisions. German command at all levels regarding future action plans were unsatisfactory. Hitler intended to hold Stalingrad for political reasons, and it seems that he sincerely hoped for success. Paulus wanted to move west, but later. Von Weichs supported Paulus. On the evening of November 22, Paulus sends the following radio message to Army Group Headquarters: |

"The army is surrounded. Despite heroic resistance, the entire Tsaritsynskaya Valley, the railway from Sovetskoye to Kalach, the bridges over the Don located in this area, the heights on the western bank of the Don up to Golubinskaya and Krayniy were in the hands of the Russians.

Troops continue to approach from the southeast through Buzinovka and especially from the west.

The situation near Surovikino and Chir is unknown.

Near Stalingrad and on the northern front active activity of reconnaissance groups. Attacks on the 4th Army Corps and the 76th Infantry Division were repulsed. In this sector the enemy broke through the defenses in several places. The army hopes to open the western front east of the Don. The southern front east of the Don is still open. It seems doubtful that it can be shot through due to the significant weakening of the northern front and the narrow lines of defense near Karpovka, Marinovka and Golubinka.

The Don is covered with a thick layer of ice, you can cross it. The fuel will soon run out, after which the tanks and heavy vehicles will stop, the situation with ammunition is tense, there will be enough food for six days.

The army intends to hold the remaining section from Stalingrad to the Don and everything for this prepared.

We hope that the Southern Front will be closed, after which food can be delivered by air.

I ask for freedom of action in the event that it fails

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create a circular defense in the south. In this case, we will be forced to surrender Stalingrad and the Northern Front in order to hit the enemy on the Southern Front between the Don and the Volga with all our might and unite with the 4th Panzer Army. An offensive to the west due to the powerful enemy forces located there and difficult terrain conditions may be unsuccessful."

Sorry, but once again I have to point out that the German communications worked two orders of magnitude better than ours. In many ways, this explains the successful actions of the Germans in the offensives of 1941 and 1942 and our extremely unsuccessful defense. It's just that in this case, serviceable tanks, and not serviceable radio stations, could save Paulus. But he had the second, but he did not have the first.

Paulus was somewhat hasty with his radiogram, the encirclement was not yet closed, but the very next day the radiogram became pure truth. On November 23, at 16:00, units of the 4th Mechanized Corps linked up with the 26th Tank Corps in the area of Kalach and Sovetsky. Soon after that, the brigades of the 4th tank corps came to Sovetsky. The southwestern and Stalingrad fronts were firmly connected with each other, closing the encirclement. Now all communications linking the 6th Army with the main forces of Army Group B were cut. It's done!

In the ring were the headquarters of the 6th Army, the headquarters of the 1\, USH, HT, ET of the army corps and the SHU of the tank corps. Most often, 22 divisions are mentioned in the list of encircled units: 14th, 16th and 24th Panzer, 3rd, 29th and 60th Motorized, 44th, 71st, 76th, 79th, 94th, 100th, 113th, 295th, 297th, 305th, 371th, 376th, 384th and 389th infantry divisions, as well as the Romanian 20th infantry and 1st cavalry divisions. By the way, I remember very well the wartime poster: "I lost my ring, and there are 22 divisions in the ring." But the fact is that there were 23 divisions! Most likely, the 9th anti-aircraft division, which did not get into the overall score, was skipped because of its subordination to the Luftwaffe. Say, what kind of pilots are in the ring? They are all long gone. But not everyone flew away. Well, once

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yes, plus many units and subunits of army subordination: engineering and construction battalions, regiments of rocket-propelled mortars, hospitals, and so on, a total of 284,000 Human.

And then the protracted and painful agony of the encircled group began. Hitler promised to rescue the encircled army, but there was absolutely nothing to rescue it. The task of unblocking the Paulus army was handed over to Field Marshal Manstein. However, in addition to the task, it was necessary to give him troops, and this was much worse. Remember, at the very beginning of the story about Operation Barbarossa, we said that the Germans had no reserves worthy of this name? Once again, this was especially clearly manifested during the operation "Winter Thunderstorm". Due to the ease of switching the keyboard from Russian to Latin, quite often now it is also called "IL Tetoezhshchet".

On the basis of the headquarters of the 11th Army, the Don Army Group was created. As always in desperate cases, the loud name hid weakness. K. On December 4, three fresh divisions arrived at Manstein's disposal: the 336th Infantry Division from Army Group B, the 7th Airfield Division and the 11th Panzer Division from Army Group Center. But to be honest, an airfield division should at best be considered half, these divisions, hastily formed from the Luftwaffe ground staff, have never been particularly combat-ready. Three divisions is a typical army group. They were united in the KhGUSH tank corps.

The main blow was dealt by the 4th Panzer Army of Hoth with the help of another hastily created fire brigade. From the Kotelnikovo area along the eastern bank of the Don, the GUP corps of General Kirchner was to advance. The corps subordinated the 6th and 23rd tank divisions, the 5th and 8th Romanian cavalry divisions.

The history of Manstein's counterattack is characterized, first of all, by yet another mutual reconnaissance mistakes. Soviet intelligence inaccurately assessed the direction of the German strike, German intelligence failed to reveal the opposing grouping of forces, as a result of which Manstein was expected by many

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numerous surprises, and extremely unpleasant ones.

The German offensive began on the morning of December 12, of course, suddenly. Manstein believed that the liberation of the 6th Army was possible, although he himself talks about this operation rather vaguely. And it can be understood. As early as early December, Paulus reported that he would run out of food and ammunition in about two weeks. The air bridge promised by Goering turned out to be a sham. The only result of attempts to supply the 6th Army by air was the destruction of German transport aircraft.

"But now the most urgent task is the offensive of the KhGUP tank corps. Having secured in heavy battles with large enemy forces that were trying to disrupt his preparations for the offensive, the opportunity to unload and take up a starting position in the Kotelnikovo area and inflicting a serious defeat on these enemy forces, on December 12, the corps launched an attack on Stalingrad. Its flanks were covered: in the east, from the direction of the Volga, by the 7th Rumanian Corps; in the west, from the side of the Don, - the 6th Romanian Corps. The offensive by all indications was a surprise for the enemy, in any case, he did not expect the offensive so soon. At first, the corps is moving forward successfully. But the enemy is urgently transferring new forces here from the Stalingrad region. It is by no means limited to defensive actions, but is constantly trying, by means of counterattacks, to recapture the area occupied by our panzer divisions or to surround parts of these divisions with superior forces of tanks. The HEUP tank corps repeatedly succeeds in defeating large enemy forces. By December 17, when the 17th Panzer Division could finally enter the battle east of the Don River, the outcome of these battles, which had been going on with varying success so far, had not yet been decided. The OKH, succumbing to the constant insistence of the army group command, finally turned over to him this division, which was in its landing area behind the left flank of the army group. But the divisions first had to commit

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a long march to the bridge over the Don at Potemkinskaya and cross this bridge before she could take part in the hostilities east of the Don River.

Once again, fresh Soviet reserves appear from under the ground, and Manstein's group is stopped. And now let's ask an interesting question: what could have happened if it hadn't been stopped? Yes, almost the same. It would not have been possible to withdraw the 6th Army from Stalingrad! Weakened people, soldiers, tired of long battles, having almost no ammunition, will they be able to make a throw of several hundred kilometers? Sorry, nonsense! I state categorically: the only way to save Paulus' army was an immediate withdrawal immediately after the start of the Soviet offensive. And the early withdrawal looked even better, when it became clear that the assault on Stalingrad was over. turned out to be a failure. Operation "Winter Thunderstorm" was pointless. Not doomed to failure, namely senseless, since he could not bring anyone out. Under certain circumstances, the KhGUP tank corps could. reach the inner ring of encirclement, which by this time had crawled far to the east. For example, the last attempt on December 24 to throw 3 tank divisions into the gap is interesting. It's good that it didn't happen. The Germans were very lucky in the sense that the shock group did not increase the number of encircled troops.

However, there was one more circumstance that cast doubt on Operation Winter Storm. The fact is that the Soviet offensive continued. Previously, it was planned to carry out Operation Saturn — to cut off and destroy the entire Army Group A in the Caucasus with a strike on Rostov. True, our command came to its senses and decided to limit itself to the Little Saturn operation, which was not so grandiose in scale. There were quite serious reasons for this. An operation more than 1,000 kilometers deep is an undertaking of exceptional complexity. Even the Germans, with their well-established rear services in the summer, did not succeed in such operations. After each jerk of 300-400 kilometers after

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took a mandatory break. So now, if our tank corps tried to move non-stop against Rostov, this would lead to their senseless and useless death.

And yet, the continuation of the offensive to the west hung Manstein's strike groups in the air. The defeat of the Italian 8th Army not only exposed Manstein's flank, but also led to the defeat of the main German air base, from which Paulus's army was supplied. The bold 150-kilometer thrust of the 24th tank corps of General Balanov forced the Germans to hastily evacuate the planes from there. Yes, Badanov's tanks used up fuel and a significant part of their ammunition, after which the corps found itself in an extremely difficult situation. However, critics forget one simple thing — sometimes even heavy losses are justified. This case is one of those.

On the other hand, Operation Koltso deserves a completely different assessment, started by the Soviet command in order to eliminate the encircled army. Now our generals started an operation that made no sense. The explanation was the same as that of the Germans: there Hitler pressed, here Stalin, who was impatient to liquidate the encircled group as quickly as possible. Although by the beginning of January 1943, Paulus had only one question: when? Incidentally, it was thanks to Operation Koltso that the German 6th Army was able to accomplish its last task—to chain as many Soviet divisions as possible to Stalingrad for as long as possible. The most reasonable thing was to block the German troops, which had completely lost their mobility (it was no longer worth talking about any mobility), with some kind of reserve formations and let the Germans themselves die in their holes. It was possible to speed up this process with artillery shelling. This is exactly what our commanders did when they gained experience. However, during the liquidation of subsequent boilers, no one hurried them.

With several blows from the Soviet troops, the cauldron was shattered into smaller pieces. started mass surrender in

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captured, despite the desperate calls of the command to continue resistance. On January 31, Paulus received the rank of field marshal and surrendered the same day. After that, Rokossovsky did what should have been done from the very beginning: he brought down the fire of all his artillery on the so-called northern pocket. He concentrated more than 300 guns per kilometer of the front. X|1 Corps withstood this shelling for only a day, and on February 2, General Strecker capitulated. The Battle of Hundred Leningrad is over.

The result of the first successful blitz operation of the Red Army was the destruction of the entire German army consisting of 23 divisions and the collapse of the southern flank of the German front. About 90,000 people were taken prisoner, including (I cannot deny myself the pleasure of listing): General Field Marshal - 1 pcs., general-oberst - 1 pcs., full general - 3 pcs., lieutenant general - 9 pcs., major general - 9 pcs. Three more German generals were killed during the fighting.

Summary. Operation Uranus, carried out by the Red Army, could be considered a standard blitzkrieg, if not for the mistakes made at its final stage. They did not affect the overall success of the operation, but did not allow the full use of the breakthrough of the German front.

Chapter 12

NOT FOR THAT THE FATHER OF THE SON BEAT WHAT WE PLAYED, BUT FOR WHAT IT WAS BEAT

In the summer of 1943, a heavy, tense expectation hung over the entire Eastern Front. In the same way, before a thunderstorm, something heavy and stuffy hovers in the air? When you are firmly convinced that lightning is about to strike, but you still do not know exactly where and when it will happen. However, the question of TBM "where" in this case was not raised. After the German counterattack in the spring near Kharkov, the line of the Eastern Front took on a very specific shape, and at the first glance at the map it became clear: it was here that My Go

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we talk, of course, about the so-called Kursk ledge or the Kursk salient. Therefore, all stories in a meaningful half-whisper about the great Soviet intelligence that obtained the plans for the German offensive, determined its time and place, should be taken with a fair amount of skepticism. The answer was very obvious. To solve the problem of whether a thrown stone will fall down, it is not at all necessary to use the full power of the GRU.

Therefore, before proceeding to consider the question of how the actions of the Germans in this operation corresponded to the longed-for ideal of blitzkrieg, from which the Wehrmacht had already departed last summer, we will try to analyze the situation in more detail.

In the winter of 1942-43, the Germans suffered a major defeat at Stalingrad, were thrown out of the North Caucasus and Kuban, retaining a small patch of land on the Taman Peninsula. In general, the front line moved to the west by 600-700 kilometers. But the main ones were not territorial losses, but losses in manpower and equipment. By the summer of 1943, Germany had lost almost 700 thousand people on the Eastern Front, and even half of these losses could not be replenished. Just as heavy were the losses in tanks and aircraft, which also could not be compensated in full. The troops of Germany's allies on the Eastern Front were utterly defeated and finally lost their combat effectiveness.

In fact, already in the spring of 1943, it became obvious that Germany had lost the war completely and irrevocably, and in all theaters. The turning point in the Battle of the Atlantic came in May 1943, and after that Admiral Doenitz's "wolf packs" could only snarl. The Allies launched offensives in Libya and Tunisia, after which the question of the fate of the German-Italian Army Group Africa could only be formulated as follows: when exactly will it capitulate? But the main thing was the

the Eastern Front was fading. It was on the outcome of these battles that the time of the final defeat of Germany depended.

Noah will not try to look the smartest, so, they say,

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I found one, came and immediately saw and saw everything to the roots. No, all this was perfectly seen and understood by the generals on both sides of the front. Another thing is that too often they were not free in their decisions and actions, and they were forced to obey the decisions of the political leadership, which had its own vision of the problem.

The headquarters of the OKW proposed moving to a strategic defense on the Eastern Front in order to try to exhaust the Red Army and inflict maximum losses on it when trying to clear the country's territory of invaders. However, this option led to the inevitable defeat of Germany, since it immediately gave the initiative to the Red Army and allowed it to concentrate superior forces on the chosen one. sector of the front, to advance there without much interference. One of the best German generals, Manstein (of course, it should have been more accurate - von Manstein, but our literature somehow got into the habit of writing him without a "background") even suggested several options for major strategic offensives that could lead to the most serious consequences for Wehrmacht. It was a blow on the southern flank of Army Group North, after which it ended up in a pocket on the Baltic Sea. Even more favorable opportunities opened up for the Soviet troops in the southern sectors of the front, where a major offensive in the direction of the Dnieper below Kiev could lead to the encirclement of the main part of the forces of Army Group South, the isolation of the Crimea and Taman.

Therefore, Manstein proposed to carry out local offensives, but not with the aim of seizing the territory, as was the case in 1941 and 1942, but only in order to inflict maximum losses on the enemy and disrupt his general offensive. Thus, the field marshal hoped to bring the war in the East to a draw. If he wrote this sincerely, then once again we can only laugh at the political naivete of the generals. However, Manstein was smart enough to add a caveat:

"Now they say that the idea of a draw in the East already in 1943 was only a dream. We will not now talk about whether this was really so. We,

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The soldiers could not judge whether it was politically possible in the spring of 1943 to reach an agreement with the Soviet Union. If Hitler had been ready for this, then such a possibility would probably not have been completely ruled out."

However, Hitler was not attracted by all this mouse fuss in the form of "local offensives", "elastic defense", "wearing down the enemy". He needed nothing more and nothing less than another grandiose victory. On his orders, the Germans began to prepare a decisive counterattack near Kursk in order to get even for Stalingrad, inflict another major defeat on the Red Army and prove that the summer offensive was, is and will forever remain the prerogative of the Wehrmacht. They hoped to seize the strategic initiative again. It was supposed to cut off the Kursk ledge and drive one and a half million Red Army soldiers into the cauldron with simultaneous strikes from the north and south. Operation Citadel was to be a torch for the whole world, as Hitler loftily proclaimed. However, we have more than once had the opportunity to make sure that crackling phrases and loud names slightly increase the combat effectiveness of units and subunits.

The German generals themselves assessed the situation more soberly. Many of the future commanders of Operation Citadel frankly did not believe in its success for the simplest reason - lack of forces. It was the same von Manstein, Model, Raus, Goth, Guderian. By the way, it was Model who was supposed to command one of the main strike groups, and Routh was to provide

actions of the second. And is it possible in such a situation to count on the success of the operation? But an order is an order, and the German generals began to PREPARE.

Probably, the Germans would have had certain chances for some partial success if they had launched offensives immediately after the end of the Kharkov operation, of course, with a pause to rest and make up for losses. However, by this time Hitler had taken possession of the crazy idea of a kind of "miracle weapon" that would decide the outcome of the war. And he several times

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ordered to postpone the offensive so that the troops would receive new tanks and aircraft. I don't know how to call the blind faith that 140 "tigers" and 200 "panthers" (although the tanks were really very strong) will be able to win the war...

The Soviet command made full use of the respite provided to it. In early March-April, the question was repeatedly discussed whether to go on the offensive immediately or take up defensive positions, bleed the German armies and only then strike back. All Soviet generals agreed on one thing - the Germans would try to cut off the Kursk salient, so it was here that an echeloned defense should be prepared and reserves concentrated. By the way, it is these statements that call into question the statements about the "excellent work of strategic intelligence". It was the strategic intelligence that made the grossest mistake in asserting that the Germans would strike the main blow from the north. However, German intelligence, as usual, worked much worse. The Germans did not even remotely represent the opposing forces. On the other hand, it was their problem. One of the main qualities of a military leader is to concentrate superior forces in the right place and at the right time. And then let the defeated lament to himself: "And there were more of them." By the summer of 1943, the Soviet command had fully mastered this component of military leadership.

But for the German generals, the sense of reality began to fail more and more often. We have already said that when drawing up the Blue plan, not only the ideas of blitzkrieg were thrown aside, but also the basic principles of military art. The same thing happened in preparation for Operation Citadel. Yes, for a moment a fresh ray of an extraordinary idea flashed when Manstein proposed, instead of striking at the base of the Kursk salient, to strike one powerful blow right at its center and split this "stump" in half, press the Soviet troops to their own minefields and destroy. But Hitler rejected this proposal, like everyone else. It was decided by force to break through the Soviet

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ron in its strongest place, relying on the quality of new tanks. But we remember that the basis of the blitzkrieg tactics was the search for the most vulnerable spot in the enemy line in order to break through there. But everything flows, everything changes.

By the way, was the bet on "tigers" and "panthers" really justified? There is such a paradoxical opinion: the "Tiger" was the best anti-tank self-propelled gun of the Second World War. This machine could best realize its outstanding fighting qualities in defense. But during the offensive, the disadvantages could come to the fore: too much weight, insufficient maneuverability of this heavy tank. Maybe even a too heavy tank. Although officially there was no such class, many German cars could be attributed to it.

Another principle of blitzkrieg was also violated - the interaction of different types of troops, and therefore the operation "Citadel" ultimately resulted in a purely tank attack. There were good reasons for this. As the historian Müller-Hillebrand wrote:

"The ability to support the advancing troops with aviation, heavy artillery from the OKH reserve, special engineering and sapper units, and so on, has never reached such a low level since the start of the war."

Doesn't this remind you of anything? After all, we have already considered one such operation, calling it a textbook example of anti-blitzkrieg. That's right, we are talking about the attack of the Yakovlev brigade on Mount Bain-Tsagan near Khalkhin-Gol. Only here all the mistakes were repeated on a hundredfold larger scale. Oddly enough, the German command, having four years of war experience behind them, suddenly decided to use the Soviet deep operation doctrine. With the same success.

The German offensive began on July 5, and it did not start at all in the way that both opponents had expected. The Soviet troops delivered a preemptive artillery strike to weaken the German strike forces advancing to the front line. For the Germans, this was an unpleasant surprise, however

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they were not seriously hindered, since the shelling was started too early. Although many probably remember the beautiful scene from the movie "Liberation", showing how Manstein is driving the front line and sees burned tanks, corpses lying around. Ah, if only that were true.

The offensive on the northern face was led by the 9th Army of General Model. This alone has raised a lot of questions. The offensive was conceived as a powerful tank attack, so why did the combined arms army have to lead it? Yes, it was reinforced with tank corps, but the army headquarters had no experience in leading tank units, and many of its decisions during the battle were questionable. It was possible to transfer here the headquarters of any of the tank armies not involved in the offensive, but this was not done. The choice of commander is also puzzling. Of course, Model was one of the most capable German generals, but he was primarily known as an infantry commander, a great specialist in defensive operations. Maybe Hitler's decision was influenced by the fact that Model was one of the few senior officers who were unconditionally devoted to him? But never before in military history has the choice of a commander based on the principle of personal devotion to the leader brought success in battles.

Model had large forces: 460,000 men, about 6,000 guns and mortars, 1,014 tanks and self-propelled guns, including 45 Tigers and all 90 Ferdinands, 730 aircraft. But these numbers look impressive only to the point where you start comparing them with the opposing forces of General Rokossovsky's Central Front. Rokossovsky had 711 thousand people, about 12.5 thousand guns and mortars, 1785 tanks and self-propelled artillery mounts. From the air, his troops were covered by the 16th Air Army of General Rudenko, which had 1218 aircraft. This disparity of power was further increased by the clever decision of Rokossovsky, who once again proved that he was perhaps the most talented Soviet military commander of the Great Patriotic War. Correctly assuming that the Germans would strike under the very base of the ledge, he concentrated on the direction

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Operation "Citadel" (Oryol-Kursk direction)

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Operation "Citadel" (Belgorod-Kursk direction)

the main blow of the enemy most of his troops - 58% of rifle divisions, 87% of tanks, 70% of artillery. Model
did not even have a shadow of a chance to break through the defenses of the Central Front. |

The pessimistic moods of the Model also played their role. According to photographic reconnaissance, he quite accurately imagined the depth and richness of the defense of the Soviet troops, which he had to break through, and therefore did not believe in any blitz. Model decided to break through the defenses of Rokossovsky with infantry forces supported by heavy tanks, artillery and aircraft, and only then bring his tank divisions into the breach — a classic battle of the past: breaking through the front with infantry forces and bringing moving parts into the breach. There was no smell of Blitzkrieg here. This ultimately reduced his chances of success to absolute zero. „ How could the unfortunate 40 "tigers" support 7 infantry divisions on a 40-kilometer front? It was beginning to resemble the very first use of English tanks in 1916. But if even then the Germans were able to cope with unfamiliar weapons without special anti-tank weapons, now the Model doomed the 505th heavy tank battalion to serious losses.

Even stranger is Model's decision to use the Ferdinands to support the infantry. If numerous et Sh were intended and created directly for this, then the Ferdinands were clearly in the wrong place. All , historians write that the major drawback of Ferdinand was the lack of a defensive machine gun. This shortcoming manifested itself especially clearly during the battles on the Kursk Bulge, when the poor self-propelled gunners were forced to fire their guns at individual infantrymen who flashed through the sights. After the battle, all the surviving vehicles were hastily re-equipped, and a course machine gun appeared on them. The car was even renamed just in case, and "Ferdinand" turned into "Elephant". So it was. But no one asked the question: why, in fact, does this machine have a machine gun? Officially "Ferdinand" was called

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"LagDraptag", that is, a tank destroyer. And practically not a single self-propelled anti-tank gun had machine guns as unnecessary. They were supposed to shoot enemy tanks from a distance, using the excellent ballistics of their guns, and not cover the infantry with armor. By the way, none of the Soviet self-propelled guns has a machine gun, even the famous "St. And they are all considered excellent combat vehicles. One must be able to use the strengths of military equipment. However, as we have already said, Model was not a tanker.

It is interesting to note that the prominent Russian historian M. Svirin named his book dedicated to the Ferdinands in full accordance with this misuse of self-propelled guns - "Ferdinand heavy assault gun". Indeed, when the design work began, the machine was called es\vere Raptag-Zb5Chap aEe - heavy armored self-propelled artillery system. In September 1942, the name was changed to Wigteesspikh, which is very close to Svirin's classification. Alas, the matter did not end there, a new option appeared: 8.8 st Cancer 43/2 5Ya 1/71 Rapgepdeeg "Greg" (P). And since then, "Ferdinand" has already passed only as a "panzerjager" or "jagdpanper". In general, it seems that this machine set a record in the Wehrmacht in terms of the number of renames, because then the actual Ferdinand, Elephant appeared ...

The first blow was to fall on the 13th army of General Pukhov. One can only wonder at Rokossovsky's intuition, because it was here that the deepest defense was built, it was here that the maximum amount of anti-tank artillery was concentrated, it was here that more than 80,000 mines were exposed. It was these minefields that from the very beginning called into question the timing of the offensive. German sappers could not cope with clearing the passages in minefields, and heavy tanks and self-propelled guns began to blow up. Even the use of Borgvard radio-controlled tankettes, which were used precisely for the destruction of barriers, did not help much.

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Each such tankette carried a charge of 500 kg, and its detonation destroyed all mines within a radius of up to 50 meters.

By the way, many authors write quite enough that the Germans had a well-established repair and evacuation service, which allowed such minor damage as a broken truck or a destroyed ice rink to be repaired in a matter of minutes. The service was really good, but the factor that we mentioned began to work against the Germans - too much weight of the new equipment. If the evacuation from the battlefield of the damaged T-Sh or T-YOU really did not present problems, then the situation was different with the "tigers" and "Ferdinands". There are a number of photographs that capture this process. To drag one self-propelled gun, three standard 18-ton 54.K1.9 were required at once. Organizing and managing such a column is a rather troublesome business, and, having appeared on the battlefield, it immediately came under fire. Therefore, with the repair of damaged too heavy tanks, a lot of problems arose, which should be taken into account when it comes to irretrievable losses. For example, out of 274 "Tigers" put out of action in 1943, only 19 were repaired. Of course, irretrievable losses were much less, we can talk about the difficulties of evacuating these steel blocks.

Model's troops began their attack at 5:30 a.m., but by 10:30 a.m., after the first modest successes, the offensive stalled. If some units crossed the minefields, it was not possible to bring in reinforcements. In the area of the main attack, the 6th Infantry Division, supported by Ferdinand self-propelled guns and numerous Luftwaffe aircraft, managed to force the Oka and gain a foothold on the opposite bank. By the way, this success cost the ill-fated Ferdinands very dearly. The 653rd battalion advancing here on the very first day lost 33 out of 45 self-propelled guns disabled. True, these were mostly mine explosions, after which the vehicles could be repaired fairly quickly, but still, such a level of losses is impressive. In addition, the Model had to take a very curious re

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schenie. He ordered that each Ferdinand company be given a platoon of T-Sh tanks, which had machine guns to cover heavy self-propelled guns.

But the 20th Panzer Division, which was part of the same KhGUP Panzer Corps, was hopelessly stuck in minefields. In the XIII sector of the tank corps, the 292nd Infantry Division, in exactly the same way, after the first success, flew into an unknown minefield and stopped. The auxiliary offensive of the XXIII infantry and KhSUJ tank corps failed completely. Model was forced to remove all artillery of army subordination from these sectors and transfer it to the main strike zone in order to ensure further advancement.

At that moment, Soviet aviation appeared. It seems that this was the first case of the mass use of anti-tank bombs - PTABs. Aviation commanders cheerfully reported the destruction of 106 enemy aircraft and 65 tanks, which was not even remotely like the truth. That's about one and a half thousand destroyed German tanks from such reports. But all aviation assistance was limited to one raid, because soon German fighters seized dominance over the battlefield. This allowed the German bomber aviation to handle the defense of the Soviet troops to its entire depth.

This is where the differences between sources begin. Some historians write that by 10.30 the Germans managed to capture Hill 254, Ozerki and Yasnaya Polyana. Others claim that at 16.30 the commander of the KhTs of the tank corps, General Harpe, informed Model that he had brought the 101st tank regiment of the 18th tank division into action (and this was a gross violation of Model's plan to save tank units for as long as possible) and managed to advance in the direction of Ozerki . However, Harpe did not expect to reach this settlement before dusk. As always, when the plan cracks, improvisations begin, and Harpe suggested using the remaining elements of the 18th division, distributing them between the 6th and 292nd divisions. As a result, the 18th division would have been pulled to pieces.

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Shortly thereafter, Model visited the headquarters of the KhGUP tank corps. Its commander, General Lemelsen, also began to destroy the original plan. He informed the army commander that he intended to bring into battle the next day the 2nd and 9th tank divisions, which Model himself intended to use to throw at Kursk after the defense had been breached.

The result of the first day of the infantry offensive of the German 9th Army was a penetration into the Soviet defense to a depth of 5 kilometers. The 6th and 292nd Infantry Divisions achieved the greatest success, but even they managed to create only narrow corridors in our defensive positions, which did not allow the panzer divisions to move further. Therefore, V. Beshanov's statement that "at the tip of the German battering ram the main strip was opened" looks more than strange. A beautiful play on words, which makes it possible to think that the Germans ripped through the defenses of [the 3rd Army, although they still had to break through the second and third lines of defense, no less powerful than the first. And they didn't break through the first line, but only pierced it in two places, and with a huge effort, weakening the pressure on other sectors of the front and prematurely using part of the reserves.

Model was later often accused of not using more tanks to break through the defenses of the Red Army. For example, General Walter Nering wrote: "Out of 6 mechanized divisions on the northern front, 5 were in reserve. This alone gave the Red Army a decisive advantage. It would be much wiser to throw a couple of panzer divisions forward.

But the fact is that Model used everything he could. Already on the first day of the offensive, he brought into battle 58% of his armored vehicles, INCLUDING all the "tigers". And even this did not bring him success. Probably, he could use all the tanks he had, but even this did not guarantee a complete breakthrough of the defense, but he definitely would not have had the strength to develop a hypothetical success.

You know, here you can make a paradoxical and, probably

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Noah, a controversial conclusion. Operation Citadel failed as soon as it began. Recall that even a successful offensive on the southern front did not give the Germans anything, since the northern half of the "pincers" had been broken by that time. And Model's offensive plan collapsed already on the first day, moreover, he began to crack just a few hours after the start of the offensive. And since the northern German grouping was noticeably weaker than the southern one, Model did not succeed in strengthening the strike or maneuvering forces. So we have reason to state that the battle on the Kursk Bulge was won by the Red Army already on July 5 at about 16.00. The Germans could still count on some local successes, but Operation Citadel had already ended in failure.

Approximately the same assessment of the situation was given by General Rokossovsky, who intended on June 6 to inflict a counter blow on the exhausted Germans and go on the offensive. Here he is a little hasty. First of all, because the Germans were far from exhausted, but there was also a second reason: on the southern front, events were far from being unfolding in the best way, and the Headquarters even suggested to Rokossovsky to consider the option of defending Kursk after breaking through the lines of the Voronezh Front. This has already mixed up all Rokossovsky's plans, and the preparation of the counterattack turned out to be crumpled.

Because of this, the battles on July 6 on the northern front were of a very intricate and complex nature, and their main feature was momentary improvisations on both sides. Model finally abandoned the idea of breaking through the Russian defenses with infantry forces and put almost all of its tank units.

At 3.30 KhGUP Lemelsen's tank corps resumed the offensive. But now the 6th infantry division was supported by the 18th and 9th tank divisions, and the 2nd tank division was advancing on the right, and in total Lemelsen had more than 600 armored vehicles. To the left, the XI tank corps advanced with the forces of the 292nd and 86th infantry divisions, and to the right, the XI] tank corps with the forces of the 20th tank and 31st

infantry divisions. All auxiliary strikes from the right and left turned into a real fiction, since all artillery and aviation were concentrated

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in the main strike zone. The model further narrowed the already insufficiently wide offensive zone and threw additional tank units into battle. However, Lemelsen decided that he still did not have enough strength, and demanded that the Ferdinands be handed over to him. Model agreed, but his headquarters worked extremely inaccurately, the orders were transmitted late, and as a result, self-propelled guns wandered aimlessly around the rear for half a day.

As soon as the fighting began, as already at 5.30 the revised plans flew head over heels. From the HQ of the Panzer Corps, it was reported by telephone that reconnaissance aircraft had detected signs of an impending counterattack by the 13th Army. General Harpe asked that the 18th Panzer Division be left to him in order to firmly cover the flank. And then Model, apparently, panicked. Reserves are used up, plans are falling apart as fast as they are created. At 5:40 a.m., he calls the headquarters of Army Group Center and informs Kluge that by evening he will have captured Ponyri, Olkhovatka, Kashara and Teploe. But he immediately declares that he does not have enough strength, and asks the field marshal to send the 10th Panzer-Grenadier and 12th Panzer divisions from the reserve. Kluge agreed, although this left the 2nd Panzer Army, which held the front on the Kursk salient, without reserves. But in return, he demanded that in the event of an offensive by the Red Army, Model would take command of both armies. The model hastily agreed.

Some time later, Model was told the good news - the 20th Panzer Division had taken Gnilets by storm. In fact, it was cleared by units of the Red Army. And here once again the vaunted German headquarters did not work well. The Germans discovered the advance of the front line of the 2nd Panzer Army of General Rodin, which was preparing to strike a counterattack, but no one bothered to inform Model about this. He went to inspect the headquarters of the advancing divisions and at the headquarters of the 20th Panzer he personally saw numerous T-34s going on the offensive. The frightened division commander demanded that Model send Ferdinands, but, as we remember, they were missing. As a result, the offensive of the division stalled, it did not

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chalk to break through to Olkhovatka, and all her achievements were limited to repelling the Russian counterattack.

Not everything is clear with the description of this counterattack. This is where the confusion we talked about begins. Our historians claim that the 107th tank brigade, advancing on Butyrki, ran into "tigers" dug into the ground. When did the advancing Germans manage to do this and why? One way or another, but after a small initial success, the counterattack was repulsed, and the Soviet troops began to back away. Rokossovsky, seeing this, ordered the reserve 60th Army of General Chernyakhovsky to begin advancing to the front line.

All day the Germans carried out one attack after another, trying to break through to Olkhovatka and Ponyri, but they had little success. Rokossovsky, taking into account the failure of the counterattack, ordered his tank units to go on the defensive and launch counterattacks only where the German infantry and light tanks were advancing. Both sides suffered heavy losses that day, but the German gains on 6 July were even less than the day before. They managed to advance only a couple of kilometers.

Both sides used the night to draw up reserves. But if Rokossovsky had these reserves, then the Model had to show extraordinary imagination. In addition to the divisions requested from Kluge, he decided to use in the offensive [the 2nd anti-aircraft division, which provided air defense of the area. Of course, the Germans used the formidable 88-mm anti-aircraft guns more than once to repel tank attacks, but these heavy guns can be used to support the offensive only in the most extreme cases. On July 7, after regrouping, the German troops tried to resume the offensive. But Model immediately made another mistake - he struck in divergent directions. The HI tank corps of Harpe tried to capture Ponyri, and the KhGUP tank corps of Lemelsen

advanced in the direction of Olkhovatka. By the way, the plan for air support for the offensive also emphasizes the lack of forces among the Germans. From 5 to 7 in the morning, aviation was supposed to support the Lemelsen corps, from 7 to 12 o'clock - the Harpe corps, and then until the evening - the XXIII infantry corps of the general

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Frisner, who was advancing on Maloarkhangelskoye. Incidentally - the third direction, even though it was considered secondary!

The most fierce battles unfolded around the Ponyri station, which both sides considered the key to the position. It was attacked by the 9th and 18th Panzer, 86th and 292nd Infantry Divisions, and the 654th Ferdinand Battalion. General Enshin's 307th Infantry Division was defending here, which was given a huge amount of artillery. But at the same time, the Germans believed that a more convenient area for introducing tanks into the breach was located to the west, and delivered a second blow in the direction of Olkhovatka-Molotychi. Such dichotomy could not lead to good.

During the fighting on July 7, the Germans managed to capture only the northern part of Ponyri, although they suffered huge losses. The attack on Olkhovatka yielded nothing at all. By the way, Rokossovsky also considered this direction to be more tanky, because mobile reserves were transferred there, and he strengthened the defense of Ponyri only with artillery. As we can see, now the advance of the Germans was no longer measured in kilometers, but in a matter of meters. About any blitzkrieg, about any breakthrough, there was no longer a sword. thief. Before the eyes of the German generals, the nightmare of a positional meat grinder appeared more and more clearly.

Apparently, Model would have willingly stopped the offensive. His divisions (especially KhPG) tank corps) suffered heavy losses, soldiers and officers were exhausted. Soviet aviation, in spite of inept leadership, gradually seized air supremacy, which further complicated the conduct of the offensive.

On July 8, the Germans once again tried to advance, and again in two directions at once, and now they made the main efforts in the Olkhovatki sector. But here they were prevented by another failure in the work of the German headquarters. General Lemelsen arbitrarily redrawn the entire composition of his corps, taking away from the 4th Panzer Division (which, according to Model, struck in this direction) its tank regiment, and formed the Burmeister battle group on the basis of the 2nd Panzer Division

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vision, but at the same time subordinated it directly to himself. As a result, the 4th Panzer Division, which actually turned into an infantry regiment, tried to storm the positions of the Soviet troops, while the consolidated tank group, reinforced moreover by the "tigers" of the 505th battalion, calmly stood still and watched it. . The Germans managed to capture the village of Teploe, but Rokossovsky and Pukhov immediately transferred reserves there, and the Germans were stopped. They also failed to break through to Olkhovatka. By the way, this episode also perfectly characterizes the confusion in the descriptions of the battles, because some historians say: "The 4th Panzer Division of General Dietrich von Saucken supported the 20th Panzer Division in the battle for Samodurovka with [01 tanks]." Although, as we can see, these tanks actually operated elsewhere. By the way, it was after the battles on July 8 that the nickname of the SU-152 self-propelled guns — "St. John's wort" — was first heard. All attempts by the Germans to attack Ponyri failed miserably.

Model was forced to cancel the attacks scheduled for 9 July in order to give his troops some rest, even though this was a de facto admission of the collapse of the Citadel plan. Field Marshal Kluge also understood this, but neither he nor Model dared to report to the top. General Lemelsen tried to imitate an offensive, but his thinned divisions achieved nothing. At a meeting of commanders on the morning of July 10, General Harpe stated bluntly that if new Russian artillery was transferred to Ponyri, then his infantry would be killed on the outskirts of the station. Model officially declared to Kluge that he would not be able to break through the Russian defenses, even if he received the promised reinforcements from the 2nd Panzer Army. Incidentally, these reinforcements arrived just in time. [On July 2, the troops of the Western Front went on the offensive, striking at the left

flank of Model's army, it was on this day that the 10th Panzer-Grenadier Division appeared. She did not have time to help the German offensive, she did not help to repel the Soviet one.

What do we have as a result? The German offensive on the northern face of the Kursk Bulge was conducted by infantry forces with the support of tanks, that is, in the style of a deep operation, not a blitz.

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krieg. After the first minor successes on July 5 and 6, the Germans were stopped, on July 7 and 8 there were positional battles, on July 9 the offensive was stopped. The counterattack of the Soviet 2nd Panzer Army was not successful, but was suspended in time, so the army did not suffer too heavy.

On the southern front, events developed according to a completely different scenario. First of all, we note a small detail. All descriptions of the battles on the northern face of the Kursk Bulge mention Oberst General Walter Model as commander of the 9th Army, which directly led the offensive. The commander of Army Group Center, Field Marshal Günther von Kluge, remains in the background. On the other hand, all descriptions of the battles on the southern front are full of the name of Field Marshal Manstein, commander of Army Group South. On the other hand, Oberst General Hermann Goth, commander of the 4th Panzer Army, which is directly leading the offensive, seems to be absent from the battle area. However, there may be another explanation for this. In addition to the Goth army, the Kempf army group, which was not subordinate to him, also advanced.

Manstein had more power than Model, so he decided to take a different tactic. He was going to break through the defenses of the Soviet troops with a massive tank attack, not paying attention to losses, assuming that Army Group South would have enough reserves to build on success. Actually, it can even be called a kind of super blitz krieg. Probably, Manstein believed that for the forces he had assembled, any Soviet defense would be a "weak point". Alas, German intelligence once again framed their generals. Neither Model nor Manstein had any idea what kind of defense they would have to face.

To break through the defense, the Germans decided to use a new, but quite logical construction of the "bell" - RaphegetskKe. And now I will allow myself a rather lengthy quotation from which I first learned about this new construction, and 40 years ago.

"When Volodin and Pashentsev came out of the crack and up

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We were heading to the checkpoint, the small light tank was already not far from the buckwheat field. At first they saw only this small tank diving in the dust, and Pashentsev, who assumed the worst and had already managed to get used to his thought and now suddenly saw something completely different, insignificant, trifling in comparison with what he expected - Pashentsev even whistled merrily; but a second later, heavy tanks appeared through still rare gaps in the settling dust, and a second later, the entire advancing column, rumbling with hundreds of caterpillars, became clearly visible. Pashentsev whistled again, but this time without that cheerful note, like a minute ago; now, like Volodin, he also stared with all his eyes at the column rushing along the wheat scree. But while Volodin, who observed a tank attack for the first time, was amazed at the grandeur of the spectacle, Pashentsev, who immediately noticed both the unusual, rhombus formation, and the harmony unusual for an attack and coherence, tried to understand the idea of the enemy. In the center of the rhombus, light tanks, self-propelled guns and caterpillar tractors with paratrooper submachine gunners moved, and heavy tanks moved along the sides. They seemed to cover the entire huge iron avalanche with their armor. For Pashentsev, this was not just unusual, as it was for the newcomer Volodin; Pashentsev had a very definite idea of tank attacks: tanks move in loose formation, and the infantry also runs after them in loose formation - it was precisely to repel such an attack that he prepared and therefore felt confident; but now everything was different from the previous battles he knew well, and he was seized with anxiety; he knew that the soldiers, looking now at this creeping black rhombus, felt the same bewilderment as he did, and

waiting for the right command from him; he was looking for this "necessary command" and did not find it, and was even more lost, realizing that his indecision could be disastrous for the company.

And one more quote, clearly showing the well-organized interaction of the heterogeneous forces of the German army, which was the key to success in many operations and thanks to which the very existence of blitzkrieg tactics became possible.

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"The first thing he immediately thought of was that the Germans would begin clearing the passage under bomb cover! But the Junkers did not reach the battalion's positions, but fell on the buckwheat field just in front of the column itself. Volodin immediately made an enthusiastic suggestion: "They hit on their own!" - but Pashentsev, although he had the same thought, was distrustful of this assumption. The Germans could not help but see the trench from above, and most importantly, they bombed quite definitely, accurately, dropping their deadly cargo in one place - in front of the column. "They are clearing mines! Bombs clear mine! They called planes on the radio and clear mine! Pashentsev finally guessed. Now everything was clear to him, now he knew how to fight.

Where do you think the quotes come from? Dry scientific work of the General Staff? No, it's clear right away. Whose memoirs? Let's say General Popel, which could be suspected. Also no. Before us is just a work of art, the story of Anatoly Ananiev "Tanks move in a rhombus". Of course, it is not recommended to study the history of the Battle of Kursk on the basis of it, but I would highly recommend reading it to all of you. Although it was written in Soviet times, but the thing turned out to be quite tough, although it is inferior to the stories of Vasily Grossman.

The Voronezh Front of General Vatutin, which had 625 thousand people, 8700 guns and 1704 tanks, had to repel the offensive on the southern front. The advancing German group had 332,000 men, 2,850 guns and mortars, and 1,500 tanks. The correlation of forces here was in favor of the Red Army, but the leadership here turned out to be far from

height.

The new T-U "Panther" tanks acted as an exotic curiosity on the southern front. However, at that time it was a completely raw, unfinished machine, which did not even require the impact of the enemy to fail. A lot of "Panthers" got stuck in place due to breakdowns of the undercarriage, ignition of engines and other breakdowns. In addition, this brigade, numbering 200 tanks and

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theoretically a formidable force, ran into a dense minefield, on which its participation in the Citadel operation ended. Here is another clear example for you, when you cannot rely on book reasoning and calculations alone. Life turns out to be much more difficult, overturning the opinion that is worth only comparing the thickness of the armor and the weight of the projectile. If literally everyone talks about the "tigers" and "Ferdinands" in the Battle of Kursk, then the "panthers" did not seem to be there.

On the southern front, the fighting began on the evening of July 4 with trial strikes. The Germans probed the defenses of the Soviet troops and tried to eliminate advanced strongholds. Unlike Rokossovsky, the commander of the Voronezh Front, Vatutin, distributed his troops evenly along the front line, failing to guess the direction of the main attack. However, this was difficult, since Manstein had more power than Model. The 4th Panzer Army of General Hoth attacked the 6th Guards Army of General Chistyakov, and the army group "Kempf" - on the left of the 7th Guards Army of General Shumilov.

The Germans went on the offensive on the morning of 5 July. On the Oboyan direction XEUSH, the tank corps of General Knobelsdorf attacked the 67th Guards Rifle Division with the forces of the 3rd Panzer Division and the Grossdeutschland motorized division. The SS Panzer Corps attacked the 52nd Guards Rifle Division. The attack was preceded by a powerful blow from the German

aviation. The Germans had too much superiority in forces, so the positions of both divisions were broken through. Our soldiers fought to the last, but they failed to stop the enemy. The enemy suffered tangible losses, but completed their task - by the beginning of the evening, the II SS Panzer Corps had already advanced 12 kilometers, but ran into thick minefields in front of the second line of defense and was forced to stop. The statements of a number of historians, for example, V. Beshanov, that the disruption of the offensive schedule in the Goth army zone led to

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collapse of the "Citadel" plan should be considered an increase. The fate of the battle was not on south.

An attempt at a counterattack on the front of the 67th division did not bring success. Two companies of the 245th Tank Regiment attacked the German "panthers", and it turned out that the Lend-Lease "Generals Lee" to these cats, as they say, one tooth. Fortunately, the Panthers themselves suffered from childhood illnesses, and 45 out of 200 tanks failed without any help from the enemy. And by July 8, only 40 Panthers remained in the ranks.

In the Korochoan direction III, the tank corps of General Breit immediately began to experience difficulties. The 6th Panzer Division lost a lot of time crossing the Seversky Donets, while the 19th Panzer Division ran into dense minefields and lost many tanks. The 503rd heavy tank battalion supporting the division lost 9 Tigers in the minefields. They are stuck in the first line of defense. More fortunate was the 7th Panzer Division, which broke through the defenses of the 78th Guards Division.

Seeing that the situation was beginning to take a serious turn, General Vatutin advanced Katukov's 1st Tank Army and two Guards Rifle Corps to the second line of defense. But at the same time, he cheerfully reports to the Headquarters about the destruction of more than 500 German tanks. It is only unclear why the Soviet troops are still retreating back?

But the mysteries of the southern facade do not end there. In his memoirs, the commander of the 1st Tank Army, General Katukov, claims that on the morning of July 6, his troops launched a counterattack against the advancing German tank corps. Colorfully tells: |

"By this time, there was a general opinion in the 1st tank division that it was simply not advisable to launch a counterattack on tank brigades and corps in the current situation.

Well, all right, we will move on the Germans ... But what will come of it? After all, their tank forces not only outnumber ours, but also have a significant advantage in armament! You can't discount this at all. Enemy "tigers" can fire their 88 mm guns at

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our vehicles at a distance of up to 2 kilometers, being in the zone of inaccessibility of the fire of 76.2-mm guns of our "thirty-fours". In a word, the Nazis are able to carry on a successful firefight with us from distant frontiers. So should they be given such a strong trump card in their hands? Wouldn't it be better under these conditions to put off a counterattack and continue to rely on our carefully prepared defense in depth?

Let the fascists rush forward in the hope that they will soon be able to break out into the operational space. Let the Nazis get stuck, perish in our defense. Meanwhile, we will grind enemy equipment and manpower. And when we bleed their parts, we break the fascist armored fist, then the favorable moment will ripen for delivering a mighty counterattack. But until such a moment has come DIL. |

We reported these considerations to the commander of the front. They waited for an answer, but did not receive it by the end of the night. Meanwhile, the deadline for fulfilling the paragraph of the order on counterattack has come, and we

there was nothing left to do but move the tanks."

What follows is a heart-rending narration of the burning T-34s and Stalin's phone call, which called off the suicidal counterattack. But why does not one of the German sources confirm the fact of the counterattack? Okay, that's half the trouble. We know perfectly well what fairy tales Glavpur composed 40 years after the end of the war. We are not surprised that the HEGUSH tank corps, with its 250 tanks, "significantly outnumbers" Katukov's army, which had over 600 tanks. But what I absolutely cannot understand is the book by E.S. Katukova "Memorable", which tells in passing about the battles on the "so-called Kursk Bulge". It would be possible to treat the memory of our soldiers with great respect ...

But back to the so-called. Knobelsdorff's tanks stubbornly tried to break through the Zividovka-Shepelevka-Yakovlevo line, but did not succeed. The 6th Guards Army, with the support of Katukov's tankers, held its positions. But the SS Panzer Corps advancing to the left of the P with a powerful blow

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broke through the defenses of the 51st Guards Division, which was not supported by tanks, and moved on. An attempt by the 22nd Guards Tank Brigade to stop the Das Reich division with a counter attack failed. However, here nature itself came to the aid of Chistyakov's troops. The Germans found that their tanks could not cross the not too deep Pena River, and Knobelsdorff was forced to turn his corps eastward along the Tomarovka-Oboyan road. The main trouble was that the SS-3 men could not be stopped. In addition, the Kempf army group finally managed to break out of the bridgehead on the Seversky Donets River, although its advance was not so successful. In general, Hausser's tanks broke through Vatutin's defenses, the breakthrough was too narrow to bring significant forces into it, and there were still defensive positions ahead.

On July 7, the German offensive continued. With the support of dive bombers, tank spearheads gradually gnawed through the Soviet defenses. This, of course, looked very little like a blitzkrieg, but the German commanders believed that they were about to finally break the resistance of the 6th Guards Army and break out into the operational space. Katukov explained what was happening with another fairy tale about 700 German tanks attacking his unfortunate corps. Therefore, it is not surprising that our attack aircraft claimed to destroy 270 armored vehicles from the Totenkopf division alone.

Something had to be done, and the commander of the Voronezh Front, General Vatutin, who had just received regular reinforcements from the Stavka reserve, decided to defeat the attack force of the 4th Panzer Army of Hoth. 5 tank corps and several rifle divisions were to dismember, encircle and destroy the corps of Knobelsdorf and Hausser. But for some reason, a frontal strike against the strongest German divisions, the Leibstandarte and the Grossdeutschland, was envisaged for this. Vatutin learned nothing from the unsuccessful counterattacks on 6 July. He was not even tempted by the opportunity to cut the German

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wedge, striking at the positions of the EP infantry corps. Only vlob!

The meeting battle on July 8 ended with the defeat of the Soviet tank corps. The attacks were carried out chaotically and uncoordinated. If anyone has distinguished himself, So this is the German attack aircraft. Attack aircraft squadron H\$-1298V-2 attacked the 4th Guards Tank Brigade. German pilots proved to be masters of their craft and big dreamers. According to various statements, they destroyed either 80 or even 105 Soviet tanks. It is not clear with whom the Gotenkopf division fought after that and with what, given the losses allegedly suffered the day before. So the reports of the pilots should be treated with great caution. To the generals too, because Vatutin reported to the Headquarters about the destruction of 1674 tanks. Goth's panzer army no longer existed, only General Goth himself did not suspect it.

In general, as it is easy to see, during the Battle of Kursk, the greatest troubles for the Soviet troops were delivered precisely by counterattack attempts. When our troops were on the defensive, the German tank units suffered huge losses and advanced extremely slowly. But only the Soviet generals were seized by the itch of activity, as this immediately facilitated the task of the enemy. It was after the failed counterattack on July 9 that the Germans achieved notable successes and came close to Prokhorovka. But neither Knobelsdorf nor Hausser was able to finally break through the defenses of the Soviet troops, so Goth's order to move to Oboyan and Kursk was not carried out.

After the panicked statements of Vatutin and General Vasilevsky, a representative of the General Headquarters who arrived to see him, Stalin handed over to the Voronezh Front from the Stepnoy two more armies - the 5th Guards and the 5th Guards Tank, which began to advance to the Prokhorovka area. Major events were brewing, to which Soviet historiography attaches special importance.

Worthy of separate consideration

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the battle near Prokhorovka, although it is unlawful to single it out from the overall picture of the Battle of Kursk. It is an integral part of the fighting on the southern front and stands out only for its scale. By the way, this was already the third counterattack of the Soviet tank units against the advancing Germans. Before him, there were counterattacks by the tank armies of Rodin and Katukov.

You know, at one time I had to visit Kursk on official business, and I simply could not, you understand, could not help but visit the famous memorial. On Sunday, my friend and I went on an excursion. The impression remains very complex. Most of all, I was struck by the silence and desolation in the museum. I perfectly remembered the hustle and bustle on Mamayev Kurgan and this... Of course, the memorial is not located in the center of a millionaire city, but if there are exactly two visitors to the entire museum, you will involuntarily become puzzled. The caretaker even seemed to be a little frightened when the guests suddenly showed up. But this is so, by the way.

In general, the situation with the battle near Prokhorovka is much more complex and multifaceted than even our historians imagine it to be. Everything cannot be reduced to Rotmistrov's counterattack on July 12 alone. It is necessary to consider the events of the previous days, and the battles on other sectors of the Eastern Front, because they had the most direct influence on the course of the battles near Kursk.

By July 10, the pace of the offensive of the southern group had significantly decreased, but it continued to move forward. In five days of fighting, she advanced 25 kilometers, although the operation plan provided that this distance would be covered on the first day. The Germans suffered heavy losses - more than 40% of the tanks and assault guns were out of order. Many of them were repaired, but they were needed here and now, and not in a couple of days, and certainly not in a week.

General Goth was forced to split his forces. The SS Panzer Corps continued to advance on Prokhorovka, but the KhGUSH von Knobelsdorff Panzer Corps was forced to turn north to secure its left flank.

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from the threat from Katukov's troops. In the south of III, the tank corps of the Kempf army group got stuck in the Soviet defenses and with great difficulty secured the flank of the Gotha strike force. Further south of X, General Routh's corps was stretching its lines dangerously. Two infantry divisions provided the entire base of Manstein's tank wedge. But it didn't even occur to Vatutin to strike here.

On July 10, the Allies landed in Sicily. But, despite this, Hitler ordered that Operation Citadel not be suspended, as Manstein continued to advance. In this regard, an interesting question arises: did Model and Kluge report that the offensive on the northern front had been stopped? Did Manstein and Hitler know about this? It gives the impression that it doesn't.

On the night of July 10, the opponents pulled up reserves to the front line, but Vatutin had more of them. Having received two fresh rifle divisions, Katukov had to stop the attempts of the HEUSH tank corps to break through to Oboyan. In addition, Vatutin transferred to him from his reserve the Guards Tank Corps and the X Tank Corps.

Von Knobelsdorff was optimistic about the future, although by that day the number of tanks in his corps had fallen to 173 vehicles. The Grossdeutschland division launched an attack at 0330 and quickly broke through the defenses, but failed to capitalize on its success. During the day of fierce fighting, she managed to advance only 5 kilometers north of Verkhopenya. This forced von Knobelsdorff to turn to General Hoth with a request for help. But Hoth managed to allocate him only a handful of Khotintsev.

All this time, the 3rd Panzer Corps of the Kempf Army Group was trying to break the resistance of the 7th Guards Army, as it was supposed to cover the southern flank of Gotha. By the evening of July 10, the 6th Panzer Division had lost more than half of its tanks. In general, X Corps itself was in a dangerous position, exposing both of its flanks, because Routh's XI Corps simply did not have enough strength to cover the extended front line. 19th Panzer Division

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The Germans achieved some success, but only because the commander of the 69th Army, General Kryuchenko, himself withdrew troops in order to shorten the front line and create reserves. In the afternoon, having received a scolding from Manstein, Kempf ordered the 6th and 19th Panzer Divisions, supported by the Tigers, to advance along the Seversky Donets River towards Sabynino. As a result, the Germans managed to advance 12 kilometers in a day, but still lagged behind Gotha's corps.

On July 10, the SS Panzer Corps of Obergruppenführer Hausser advanced along both banks of the Psel River with the forces of the Leibstandarte and Gotenkopf divisions, but none of them achieved serious success. The Das Reich division fought fierce battles all day, but practically did not budge. This day was one of the most unfortunate for the Germans.

Oddly enough, both sides looked at the situation rather optimistically, although both Russians and Germans had reason to be concerned. Knobelsdorff and Hausser were preparing to continue their attack on Prokhorovka, and Vatutin was going to meet them with a counterattack. He ordered Katukov to firmly hold the front, but at the same time to gather forces for a counterattack. The main task of Katukov was to prevent the participation of the Grossdeutschland division in the offensive.

However, Vatutin had more grounds for optimism than Manstein. The Germans had only the 20th Panzer Corps as a reserve, while the entire Steppe Front was at the disposal of the Headquarters of the Supreme High Command. It was from there that on July 9 the advance of Rotmistrov's 5th Guards Tank Army to the Prokhorovka area began. At the same time, just in case, Vatutin strengthened it even more.

On July 11 the German offensive on the southern face of the Kursk salient was reduced in fact to the advance of the Leibstandarte division alone towards Prokhorovka. Neither Das Reich nor Gotenkopf were successful that day. Yes, and the "Leibstandarte" only slowly pressed the 9th Guards Airborne Division, but failed to break through its front. In general, the offensive was already on the southern front, which was

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called, on its last legs. The offensive front to the zone of one division. Nevertheless, in the historiography of the SS divisions, one can find phrases like: "On July 11, the Totenkopf and its two fraternal divisions from the SS troops swept away the remnants of Soviet resistance." As you can see, lie to your mind

just everything.

But Manstein decided to make one last attempt. The SS Panzer Corps was supposed to try to break through to Prokhorovka, the 3rd Panzer Corps, with the support of the Das Reich division

was supposed to support him with a strike from the south, and the KhGUSH tank corps received an order to force the Psel River south of Oboyan.

It is very difficult to understand the meaning of Vatutin's decision to strike the German strike group in the forehead, because the oncoming tank battles on July 6 on the northern front and on July 8 on the southern front ended in failure for us. But there is one simple explanation: Stalin demanded it. However, Vatutin and Rotmistrov could take a closer look at the situation. The enemy's problems with breaking through the Soviet defense in depth grew rapidly, and, as we have already noted, the southern flank of the grouping was frankly weak. Rotmistrov's army would have crushed the X] corps of Raus in a matter of hours, after which it could have gone to the rear of the corps of Knobels-, Dorf and Hausser. It would be a classic blitzkrieg - hitting a weak spot and encircling. It is unlikely that this would have led to the destruction of the entire German 4th Panzer Army, but General Goth could not even dream of any offensive after that. However, Vatutin and Rotmistrov chose the most unfortunate course of action, allowing the German tanks to demonstrate their merits in defense in full splendor. However, Vatutin was reproached more than once for setting tasks for the troops without trying to assess their real capabilities.

The divisions of the 5th Guards and 5th Guards Tank Armies, which included about 850 serviceable tanks and self-propelled guns, were to participate in the counterattack. Having concentrated about 60 tanks per kilometer of the front (the pink dream of the creators of the theory of deep operation), the Soviet

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mandovane counted on a steel roller just to crush everything in its path.

The worst thing is that the Germans, according to air reconnaissance, were well aware of the concentration of Soviet troops and were preparing to meet a counterattack. But only one Leibstandarte division had to repel the attack of the tank army, that is, there could be no talk of any one and a half thousand tanks. By this time, less than a hundred tanks remained in the division. However, the Germans skillfully deployed their forces, transferred self-propelled guns to the tank-dangerous direction between the Oktyabrsky state farm and a height of 252.2 and prepared to repel attacks.

The artillery preparation began at 0800, and the fire was carried out blindly, the effectiveness of the preparation was very low. Half an hour later, Rotmistrov's tankers moved forward. On the right, the 18th Panzer Corps advanced in three echelons, and on the left, the 29th Panzer Corps. They were supported by several batteries of self-propelled artillery. General Rotmistrov described this attack very vividly, describing how his tanks "literally pierced the enemy's battle formation." As a result, "his "tigers" ... were successfully hit by Soviet T-34 and even T-70 tanks from short distances." It is a pity that these memoirs were published in 1984, otherwise this fantasy could be found a simple explanation. Rotmistrov played the computer game "Panzer General" a little, where you can see the same amazing pictures, only with an American twist. Terrible M-3 "Stuart" famously burn the helpless "Royal Tigers"...

In reality, everything was different. German tanks deployed on the crests of the hills calmly set fire to Soviet tanks. Doesn't this remind you of anything? That's right, we already wrote about it. The mediocre and helpless attempts of the British to attack Rommel's corps during the battle at Gazala. In the same way, one tank brigade after another burned there. |

At the cost of monstrous losses, our troops managed to break into the Oktyabrsky state farm and drive out the SS men from there. At least in this our attack turned out to be more effective than the English

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who brought nothing at all. But what was it worth... For example, the 25th tank brigade lost 55 tanks out of 69.

Recently, it has become fashionable to deny the exploits of the soldiers of the Red Army during the Great Patriotic War. This is largely due to the extreme stupidity and elephantine clumsiness of the Glavpur bottling propaganda, which first invents fantastic feats in the style of the Cossack Kozma Kryuchkov, who planted seven Austrians on one peak, and then stands to death defending such nonsense. Up to accusations of "dissemination of deliberately false fabrications", which not so long ago threatened with more than serious terms. For example, tank rams during the Battle of Kursk are called into question. Well, let's turn to a deliberately biased witness who had no reason to admire the actions of the Red Army soldiers. Here is a record of Michael Wittman's story about the events of July 12: |

"A large group of Russian tanks continued to move towards Wittmann's platoon at high speed. He immediately ordered Woll: .

"Aim for the lead tank, Bobby"

Voll aimed his cannon and fired.

"Direct hit!" - shouted Möller, who from the driver's seat saw the death of another enemy tank in his viewing devices.

They saw how the shell crashed into the left side of the T-34. However, the enemy car rolled a little further and only then exploded with a terrible roar. Wittman ordered the driver to move the tank a little forward so that it would be better to aim. As soon as the tank stopped, Woll fired again and destroyed another Russian tank before it could fire itself...

"Attention, they're right in front of us!" Wittmann shouted over the radio to his platoon. To the "tiger", which was to the left of Wittman, a burning T-34 rushed. Wittmann feared that the driver of this car intended to commit suicide and ram the Löttsch tank, after which the Russians would certainly

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they will ascend to heaven, but at the same time they will take Löttsch and his crew with them. |

"Damn, damn! yelled Löttsch. - Driver! Forward, or they'll ram us and set us on fire!"

The driver of the "Tiger" Löttsch threw the tank forward, trying to evade the burning enemy vehicle. The gunner at this time carefully aimed and fired at a moving target from a distance of only 80 meters. The shell hit the T-34 turret and ricocheted into the sky with a screech! The crew of Löttsch waited for the Russian tank to explode at any moment, but this ball of flame continued to rush forward. The gunner of the "tiger" did not get time to shoot a second time. The T-34 flew up close and rammed the Tiger before Löttsch could order the driver to turn away. The flames from the burning Russian car quickly engulfed the Tiger. Half German

The crew panicked and tried to jump out of the tank."

Here is the evidence of a direct participant in the events. Maybe Wittmann was talking about a ram that was made by the crew of Captain Skripkin, commander of the 2nd Battalion of the 181st Tank Brigade? Yes, a tank ram was an exceptional phenomenon, but such cases also took place. Therefore, it cannot be considered that the question of the events of July 12 is finally closed.

The only relative success was on the right flank, where the 181st Tank Brigade attacked. It succeeded in crushing the reconnaissance battalion of the Leibstandarte division, but the division commander, Brigadeführer Wisch, promptly transferred his meager reserve to this sector, and the attack was stopped. Worse, the SS Panzer Division Gotenkopf, which was occupying positions to the left, went on the offensive and began to push the 52nd Guards Rifle Division. On the left flank of Rotmistrov, the Das Reich division began to move forward. By 17.00 all

ended. The 5th Guards Tank Army advanced a couple of kilometers, losing 340 tanks and 17 SPGs.

Oddly enough, Katukov's battered army achieved the greatest success on July 12. His 1st Panzer Army

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on was to strike to the southeast and cut off the German strike force. Although this strike was not crowned with success and the advance of the Soviet troops was minimal, Katukov managed to tie von Knobelsdorff's divisions into battle. The threat to the left flank forced the German general to abandon the planned offensive and even transfer the 3rd Panzer Division to the threatened sector. If not for this, Rotmistrov's position could have become quite bad.

Meanwhile, began to approach another trouble. We have already said that the commander of the 69th Army, General Kryuchenkon, to put it mildly, did not respond adequately to the situation. And here the German III Panzer Corps, which had frankly stalled in place for the last few days, suddenly achieved success. In the morning, units of the 6th Panzer Division managed to cross the Seversky Donets and began to push the troops of the 48th Rifle Corps. At the same time, the 7th Panzer Division went on the offensive, with only 39 tanks left. Several reserve brigades were deployed to help Kryuchenko, but the commanders lost control of the troops. The corps headquarters was subjected to constant air strikes, and Soviet aviation took the most active part in them. The 48th Rifle Corps found itself in a sack between the II Panzer Corps and the II Panzer Corps of the SS, but so far held its positions, albeit with great difficulty.

However, the rapidly changing and extremely confusing environment allowed the He-111 group to deliver accurate , a bombing attack on the headquarters of their own 6th Panzer Division. The ground troops did not remain in debt either. The anti-aircraft gunners of the II SS Panzer Corps managed to knock out the E-189 spotter, the famous "frame", although the Soviet aviation had nothing like this aircraft.

But the main event of July 1 and 2 was the offensive by the troops of the Bryansk and Western fronts on the northern front against the German 9th and 2nd armies. In such a situation, the continuation of the offensive in the south was the utmost stupidity, and on July 13 Hitler stops it. Note: not on July 11, the day after the Allied landing in Sicily, but the day after the Soviets went on the offensive

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troops. Operation Citadel, the apotheosis of the German anti-blitzkrieg, is over. |

But the fighting didn't end. Manstein decided to try to win at least a local victory by cutting off and destroying the 48th Rifle Corps. On July 13, both sides spent mainly on the regrouping of troops, although local battles were fought along almost the entire front. On the morning of July 14, the Das Reich division launched an offensive in the southeast direction. The 7th Panzer Division was advancing to meet it. However, the resistance of the Soviet troops became more and more stubborn every day, and the German divisions were already pretty exhausted. The 7th Panzer achieved more success, but its breakthrough has so far been localized.

We have already said more than once that the success of the Germans was largely due to the well-established interaction of troops, which required the flawless operation of communication systems. With us, unfortunately, things were different. The headquarters of the 69th army lost contact with the headquarters of the 48th corps, although the distance did not exceed 50 kilometers. Note that these are high-level headquarters. And under such conditions, how can one count on, say, operational radio control of, say, a tank regiment? You can talk about it, but it is unlikely to establish a connection. But after all, two years of the war were already behind, but nothing had changed. As a result, General Kryuchenkon sent his deputy, Major General Trufanov, to lead the withdrawal of the corps' troops from the bag. K. On July 15, this was done, and badly battered divisions jumped out of the emerging pocket. On the evening of July 15, units of the Das Reich divisions and the 7th Panzer Division met, but the boiler was already empty. AND

All this happens after the allegedly super-successful counterattack of the 5th Guards Tank Army, which completely bled and exhausted the enemy! Therefore, the order given by Vatutin on July 16 is not at all surprising: "In order to finally exhaust the forces of the advancing enemy grouping, the armies of the Voronezh Front go over to a stubborn defense on the occupied lines with the task of preventing the enemy from breaking through our defenses."

The result of the fighting in the Prokhorovka area was a severe defeat

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the formation of the Voronezh Front, largely due to the erroneous actions of the front command and a number of armies. However, to say that the Soviet troops were on the verge of disaster is also wrong. The Germans no longer had the strength for more decisive action.

Summary. Operation "Citadel" was carried out in complete contradiction to the postulates of the blitzkrieg, although both German commanders violated them in their own way. The model returned to the old principles of infantry offensive with some tank support, which was reasonable when trying to break through deep defenses. Manstein, on the other hand, tried to strike with panzer divisions with little or no infantry support. However, the German offensive from the very beginning was doomed to failure due to a simple lack of forces. The defeat at Kursk really marked the final turning point in the course of the Great Patriotic War, but in a slightly different sense than is usually said. After it, the Wehrmacht finally lost the opportunity to conduct successful operations on a strategic scale, both offensive and defensive.

Chapter 13 Blitzkrieg rolled to the West

As we have already said, the Battle of Kursk was not only Germany's last attempt to wrest strategic initiative from the Red Army. It became a turning point of the war in the sense that after it the Wehrmacht finally lost the ability to carry out successful actions on a strategic scale. If earlier he could at least conduct large defensive operations such as Rzhev-Vyazemskaya, then by 1944 local operations of an operational scale became the ultimate dream of panzer generals. Yes, the German divisions could still successfully hold the city of M for a week or two. Yes, during the counterattack they could still throw back the Soviet troops by 20-30 kilometers. But no more! To hold the same city M for two more months the Germans no longer

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could, unless the Red Army, for strategic reasons, transferred the severity of the blow to another sector of the front. And the Germans did not manage to throw back the Soviet troops for 50 kilometers until the very end of the war. A reasonable question may arise: so why did the struggle drag on for so long? The first obvious answer is that the Wehrmacht was too huge a structure, and the usual inertia force inherent in such a large mass worked. It is simply impossible to stop it in one moment. The second, no less important, reason was that the Soviet command had not yet fully mastered the changed situation and had not yet learned to act as a complete master of the situation. I still remember the lessons of 1941-1942, the education of the victorious instinct is a long and painful process. But when he appears, then the resistance of this army becomes useless, which was proved by the Red Army in 1945. But in 1944 things were a little different. We will consider only three operations that can be considered the most indicative in terms of compliance with the ideas of the big and small blitzkrieg.

Chronologically, the Korsun-Shevchenkovsky operation was the first, by the way, the most controversial in terms of results. However, if we recall how General Vatutin commanded during the Battle of Kursk, this is not particularly surprising.

By January 1944, the general strategic situation had developed in such a way that the so-called Kanevsky ledge had formed on the southern sector of the front. The Germans stubbornly clung to the coast of the Dnieper in the Kanev region, although by this time the troops of the 1st Ukrainian Front had bypassed them far from the west. On the ledge were || German divisions, and their position inspired serious concerns, but Hitler was not going to withdraw them. It's not even about the propaganda slogan "German cooks continue to draw water from the Dnieper." There were also some military considerations. Manstein, of course, blames the Fuhrer for everything. But it seems that the OKH, having lost its sense of reality, was still dreaming of a possible success.

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Complete destruction of the group of enemy troops 179

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Korsun-Shevchenko operation

re to the flank of the 1st Ukrainian in the direction of the White Church, ALTHOUGH the Germans no longer had the strength for this.

An interesting feature of this operation is that the Soviet command decided to start it without a serious superiority in forces. The troops of the 1st and 2nd Ukrainian Fronts had a total of about 250,000 men, 5,300 guns, and 670 tanks against the Germans' 170,000 men, 2,600 guns, and 250 tanks. However, not far from the area of the planned pocket, the Germans had several tank divisions in reserve, which had about 600 tanks.

The 2nd Ukrainian Front launched an offensive on January 24, and on the very first day the German tactical defense was almost broken through. But General Konev acted too sluggishly and did not take advantage of the favorable situation. Just follow

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The next day, General Rotmistrov's 5th Guards Tank Army was brought into battle, breaking through the German positions. But the delay had an effect, as the enemy brought up reserves and managed to slow down the offensive. Moreover, our 20th and 29th tank corps were themselves cut off. And then the commander of the front, General Konev, showed that we had already learned not to be afraid of the Germans. He makes a decision completely unthinkable just a year ago. The 20th Corps continues its offensive towards the units of the 1st Ukrainian Front, the 29th Corps takes up the defense with the front to the south, and the reserve units cut through the thin German arm. And so it happened! January 28 tanks of the 20th corps in the village of Zvenigorodka met with the vanguard of the 6th

tank army. And the German barriers in the offensive zone were overturned and destroyed, the formation of the external and internal fronts of the encirclement began.

The offensive of the 1st Ukrainian Front began two days later and at first did not go so smoothly. Heavy fighting ensued in the planned area of the breakthrough, and progress was minimal. General Vatutin, who commanded the front, had to shift the point of application of forces, but in the end, after the 6th Panzer Army was brought into battle, the German defenses were broken through here too. But after the breakthrough, the offensive went on unhindered, and there were no problems until the meeting with Konev's 20th Panzer Corps.

So, we have a kind of classic blitzkrieg operation. The front is breached, large enemy forces are encircled, tank units enter the operational space, a period of development of success begins ... But no! This is what Guderian would have done. This is what Manstein would have done. But the Soviet generals did not do that. Not yet. Yes, one reason lay literally on the surface. Panzer divisions suffered losses in the course of the offensive, in addition, thaw began, and not only cars, but even tanks got stuck in the mud. But, most likely, the very lack of a victorious instinct, which had already prevented us from developing the success of the breakthrough at Stalingrad and destroying the German troops on the Se

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true Caucasus. In the same way, now it was still necessary to try to strike further. After all, the combined forces of the two fronts had an excellent prospect of cutting off the entire Nikopol grouping, moreover, all German forces west of the Dnieper.

Apparently, for the second time, when the success of the operation exceeded all expectations, the Soviet command was at a loss and did not show flexibility, reacting in accordance with the changed situation. On the other hand, if you look at the attracted forces, it becomes clear that the advancing armies were not set big tasks from the very beginning. Defeating an entire army group with 700 tanks is more than DIFFICULT.

In addition, a mistake was made that was completely unusual for the Germans. Before the breakthrough began, significant forces were again used to "fetter" the enemy. Oh, it's shackling! It becomes a real scourge of Soviet offensives, diverting from a quarter to a third of the forces that could be used to develop success. The point is that even if—even if! - The Germans decided to try to transfer troops from the non-attacked sectors of the front to the battle area, this would take time. And the Soviet divisions would have been there from the very first day.

In general, the Korsun blitzkrieg lasted exactly 4 days, after which the destruction of the encircled group began. The group was not going to capitulate or die, and the soldiers of General Stemmerman offered fierce resistance. The ultimatum presented by the Soviet command was rejected. By the way, we note again that it is precisely such attempts to fight to the end that call into question the key idea of the blitzkrieg - increasing the pace of operations. At the same time, the German command began to prepare a deblocking strike. Manstein was again appointed as the savior of the fatherland on the scale of the 8th Army.

As always, Soviet historians sing the usual song about the superiority of the Germans in forces, especially in tanks. "Some German tank divisions (mostly SS divisions) had heavy tank battalions

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Tiger tanks, Ferdinand assault guns. Tiger tanks were also in service with the 503rd and 506th separate tank battalions," writes A.N. Grylev. In total, Manstein collected about 1000 tanks, despite the fact that only 307 Soviet ones opposed them on the outer ring of encirclement. To be honest, these stories about the ubiquitous "Ferdinands" stuck in my teeth. And in general, what would be the result of a strike by 1000 German tanks is not difficult to imagine.

First, the Germans tried to break through the encirclement in the zone of the 2nd Ukrainian Front, because the distance to the so-called Gorodishchensky ledge was minimal here. But the successes of four tank divisions, which managed to advance only 5 kilometers, turned out to be minimal. Stemmerman, meanwhile, was concentrating his troops on Korsun Shevchenkivskyi, gradually reducing the line of defense and getting ready to break through to meet the deblocking groups.

As a result, the main efforts were transferred to the zone of the 1st Ukrainian Front. The tank division "Leibstandarte" appeared here, which spoiled so much blood for our soldiers near Kursk. The commander of the 1st Panzer Army, General Hube, sent an optimistic radiogram to those surrounded, urging them to hold on and a firm promise to help them out. He really concentrated three panzer divisions with the support of two battalions of "tigers" and went on the offensive on February 4th. On February 6, another panzer division arrived at his disposal. In order to fend off the German attack, Vatutin brought into battle the 2nd Panzer Army, which was still in reserve. Here a reasonable question immediately arises: why was it not previously used to develop success? The German offensive was temporarily halted, and they took a break to regroup their forces.

On the morning of February 11, the Hube shock group (Sh Panzer Corps) again went on the offensive in the direction of Rizino-Lysyanka. At the same time, Stemmerman's encircled troops attempted to strike towards them from the Steblev area. After fierce battles they managed to break through to

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Shenderovka, and the distance to the vanguards of Hube was only about 10 kilometers. But these kilometers still had to be covered. Some of the modern Russian historians are trying to justify the frank clumsiness of Vatutin's actions by saying that the Germans allegedly tried to break through at the junction of two fronts. Full of you! Well, look at the cards you publish in your own books! All events took place in the zone of the 1st Ukrainian front, the junction of the fronts was located several tens of kilometers to the east.

And yet the situation was really confused, and confused: its Soviet command. The outer ring of encirclement was held by Vatutin's front, and the inner one by Konev's front. And it was really difficult to coordinate their actions, although there was a special representative of the Headquarters who was supposed to deal with this. Who? That's right, Marshal Zhukov. It only ended with the fact that "Marshal of the Soviet Union Zhukov, who coordinated the actions [of the 2nd Ukrainian Fronts], failed to organize a clear interaction between the troops that repelled the enemy's onslaught, and was recalled by the Headquarters to Moscow."

In general, the situation was strange - both sides were dissatisfied. The Germans could not break through, the Red Army could not destroy the boiler, although by February 16 it had shrunk to a meager size. The headquarters of the German 8th Army radioed Stemmermann that the offensive of the 3rd Panzer Corps had stalled and that he himself had to break through to meet him. Stemmermann preferred to remain with the rear guard to cover the breakthrough, which was entrusted to command by Lieutenant General Theobald Lieb. By this time, the cauldron had literally shrunk to a patch with a diameter of a few kilometers around Shenderovka. Hitler's permission was required for a breakthrough, but Manstein realized that delaying death was like, and sent a short telegram to Stemmermann: "ZIsymop Yegeshey. /leots GuzuapkKa. 23.00 "-" Password "Freedom". Goal Lysyanka.

And at 23.00 the Germans in three columns went to break through with attached bayonets at the ready. After a fierce hand-to-hand fight, some of them managed to break through. However, the left

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the column ran into the tanks of the 5th Guards Tank and was practically destroyed. It dawned, but the fighting was still going on. Konev, realizing that there was a danger of losing the Germans, threw in

an attack by a brigade of the 20th Panzer Corps, armed with new IS-2 tanks. Having discovered that the Germans did not have anti-tank artillery, the tanks simply crushed the wagons and vehicles with their tracks.

By noon, the disorganized crowd reached the Rotten Tikich River. The crossing was very reminiscent of everything that happened on the Berezina in 1812, and no statements by German historians will make me believe in "organization and order". Moreover, the German officers themselves admit in their memoirs: for the first time among German soldiers, there are signs of Kezze[ig]sch! - fear of boilers. Pictures of the battlefield clearly prove that there was no order or organization at all.

The commander of the division of the SS Panzer division "Viking" Gille crossed the river by swimming, although Marshal Konev later wrote in his memoirs: clothes. I rule out that he made his way on a tank or transporter through our positions and strongholds. Thank God, no "women's dress" appeared, although no one really made it through the tank.

The outcome of the battle was unsatisfactory for both sides. The Soviet blitzkrieg, which started well, was stopped by its own command, which made it possible for part of the encircled group to escape, although Soviet historiography for a long time insisted on the complete annihilation of the troops that fell into the cauldron. At the same time, the encircled divisions ceased to exist as combat units and had to be re-formed. The Germans stubbornly insist that 35,000 out of 60,000 encircled men broke through, but this raises the most serious doubts. Most likely, as is usually the case in such dubious episodes, the truth lies somewhere in the middle.

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The next operation, which, by the way, deserves special attention, is Operation Bagration. From my point of view, which everyone is free to challenge, this is the most brilliant operation of the Red Army in the entire period of the Great Patriotic War. In terms of perfection, only Guderian's breakthrough at Sedan and Rommel's blow at Gazala can be compared with it. But the scale of these operations is many times smaller, and, as we well remember, the complexity of command and control of troops increases in proportion to the square of the number, so the achievements of General Rokossovsky deserve much higher marks than the actions of panzer generals. Especially when you consider the stubbornness and experience of the enemy who opposed him.

The plan of the operation, which provided for the simultaneous defeat of two enemy groups holding the "Belarusian balcony", belonged to General Rokossovsky. Zhukov claimed that the plan had been prepared in Moscow even before the meeting, which was attended by representatives of the Stavka and front commanders. This is the absolute truth. But it is also true that the developments of Rokossovsky's headquarters were sent to Moscow even earlier. This is confirmed by an absolutely disinterested witness, S.M. Shtemenko. By the way, one curious episode is connected with the book of his memoirs "The General Staff during the War Years".

Some now popular historian decided to sparkle with wit and ridicule one of the proposals of the General Staff. The offer was really not the most reasonable. But the method he chose is even worse - a fragmentary quotation so beloved by the Soviet historical school. Compare for yourself:

"The idiocy of this "new idea" was so obvious that, as Shtemenko recalls, "we were corrected." We decided - to surround, where to go here. This is what Mr. M writes in his work "Stalin's Ten Strikes". And now let's see what Shtemenko actually said: "During these two days, the goal of the Belarusian operation was finally formulated - to encircle and destroy the large forces of Army Group Center in the Minsk region. General Staff as

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Operation "Bagration"

already noted, did not want to use the word "environment", but we were corrected. The encirclement was to be preceded by the simultaneous defeat of the enemy's flank groupings - Vitebsk and Bobruisk, as well as his forces concentrated near Mogilev. This immediately opened the way to the capital of Belarus in converging directions. Do you feel the difference? Moreover, this paragraph is already on a completely different page of memoirs and is devoted to a different episode. But - two words are snatched out, and the broth is ready. No, beware of short quotes!

The operation began on June 22, 1944. Probably, there is some kind of higher justice in this - exactly 3 years after the start of the Great Patriotic War, the Red Army began its most brilliant operation. The offensive was carried out on a wide front, but the main blows were struck in the areas of Vitebsk and Bobruisk. The beauty of Rokossovsky's plan lay in the fact that one gigantic supercauldron was not planned, formed by converging strikes on Minsk, after which one would have to mess with the destruction of two or three armies, although, most likely, it was possible to encircle them. No, small boilers were planned with the rapid destruction of encircled small groups. The ill-fated example of Stalingrad was still

fresh in memory.

First, the German defenses crackled near Vitebsk in the offensive zone of the 3rd Belorussian Front. On the very first day of the offensive, the 6th Guards Army broke through the defenses and expanded the breakthrough to 50 kilometers. There was a gap between the [Chi IP buildings. The commander of the 3rd Panzer Army, General Reinhardt, requested permission to withdraw. But here, oddly enough, Adolf Hitler helped the Red Army in many ways. By this time he had lost all sense of reality and was busy building sandcastles on a large scale. Many cities and towns scattered along the entire Eastern Front were declared "fortresses", although in reality they represented

a few primitive field fortifications hastily built on the outskirts of settlements. The units of these "fortresses" received

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order not to retreat and fight to the last bullet. On March 8, 1944, Hitler clarified his definition of a fortress when he issued Order No. 11:

"A distinction will be made between "fortified areas" (Eeyae Rake), each of which will be under the command of a "fortified area commandant", and "local strongholds" (Otsyayerip Me), under the command of a military commander.

"Fortified areas" will play the role of fortresses... They will prevent the enemy from occupying areas of decisive tactical importance. They will allow the enemy to surround themselves, thus pinning down the greatest number of his forces and creating conditions favorable for successful counterattacks.

"Local strong points" are strong points located deep in the combat zone, which will be strongly defended in the event of an enemy infiltration. Being included in the main scheme of hostilities, they will serve as a reserve of defense, and in the event of an enemy breakthrough, the cornerstone of the front, forming positions from which it will be possible to carry out counterattacks.

This directive clarified the powers of the commandants of fortified areas and placed them under direct subordination to the commander of the respective army group. Every person in the fortified area, regardless of military rank or civil status, was subordinate to the commandant. The garrison had to constantly be in the fortified area and prepare defensive structures. As a rule, Hitler announced the fortified status of the area so late that there was no time to build any significant fortifications before the arrival of the Soviet troops. He ordered the garrison to be at the disposal of the commandant when there was only enough time to take up positions. According to Hitler's definition, it is difficult to distinguish between a fortified area and a fortress, except for the moment when the fortified areas were mainly in the Eastern

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front and, as a rule, did not have fortifications. In general, the Fuhrer drove his troops into the boilers with his own hands, which was especially pronounced during the Bagration operation.

Hitler refused to allow the III Corps to withdraw, but General Reinhardt and Field Marshal Busch, commander of Army Group Center, saw what was happening. They ordered the corps commander, General Gollwitzer, to prepare for a breakthrough. Late! On June 24, the 4th airfield division was surrounded southwest of the city, and the remaining 3 divisions of the corps ended up in a mousetrap in Vitebsk itself. Pay attention to an important point: all the boilers turned out to be quite small, not the ones that the Sovinformburo reports about under the roar of artillery salute. But I didn't have to deal with them either. Already on July 25, the 4th airfield division ceased to exist under the blows of the 39th Army, and the Vitebsk cauldron itself broke up into two more. The 246th Infantry and 6th Airfield Divisions were surrounded 10 kilometers from Vitebsk, and the 206th Infantry was stuck in the city. Under the blows of Soviet aviation, their forces were melting away literally before our eyes. By the evening of June 26, the position of the encircled became hopeless, and General Gollwitzer decided to try to break through in order to save what could still be saved. At dawn on June 27, the Germans launched a breakthrough in small groups. The result of such attempts is well known to us from the events of the summer of 1941. The MI Corps was completely destroyed. True, the Germans still continue to argue about what exactly happened to him. According to some sources, 20,000 soldiers died and 10,000 were taken prisoner. Other historians claim that 5,000 soldiers died and 22,000 were captured. I think, when they find out everything thoroughly, it will be possible to amend the new edition of this BOOK.

Here we have to make a small digression. As we have already seen, in 1941 the Germans very often managed to conduct a blitzkrieg without the participation of tanks. Almost the same thing happened now. Only one tank army, the 5th Guards Army, took part in Operation Bagration. The reason was

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quite understandable: the forests and swamps of Belarus are not the best terrain for tanks, they could only operate along the Minsk-Moscow highway. It was there that the German defense was broken through. Most importantly, the Soviet tanks did not linger, "forming an outer encirclement", but moved on to Borisov, as prescribed by all the canons of the blitzkrieg. Parallel to the tank army, General Oslikovsky's cavalry-mechanized group was advancing. Very quickly, the Germans experienced the effectiveness of their own tactics in their own skin. The remnants of the XXUP Corps, which tried to escape from Orsha, ran into the tanks that had broken through, with a quite predictable result.

The Germans faced a difficult task - to try to stop the rapid advance of Soviet tanks, in which the 2nd Guards Tank Corps, which was operating south of Rotmistrov's army, also now participated. The Berezina River was chosen as a defensive line. This thankless task was entrusted to the 5th Panzer Division, hastily transferred to Minsk from the Ukraine. She was also attached to the 505th battalion of heavy tanks. It was his "tigers" who on June 28 were the first to collide with the 3rd Guards Tank Corps near the Krupki station, but were forced to retreat.

The Soviet command mastered the tricky science of blitzkrieg, and Rotmistrov's tanks did not have to fight alone with the arriving German reserves. On June 29, 5 rifle divisions of the 11th Guards Army were already brought up to help the tanks. With a combined attack by infantry and tanks (!) the German defenses were broken through a little north of Borisov, in a weaker place (!), and after short fighting on June 30, the German defenses on the Berezina collapsed. Guderian could have rejoiced at such a skillful application of his theories, but something tells me that the news of these events did not make the Inspector General Panzerwaffe happy.

The attack on Minsk from the south, which was led by General Rokossovsky's 1st Belorussian Front, did not develop so successfully in the first days because of the swampy terrain. But on June 24, the main forces of the front entered the battle, and the German

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the rhone was broken here too. The commander of the 9th Army, General Jordan, decided to throw into battle his only reserve, the 20th Panzer Division. By the way, pay attention to the scarcity of German reserves. A division there, a division here, no more. But these were OKH problems. War is not a chess game where both players receive 16 absolutely identical pieces before the start. Everyone has what he managed to collect. And failed...

The 20th Panzer Division ran into the advancing Soviet troops south of Bobruisk and was destroyed. By June 26, the 1st Guards Tank Corps reached the city from the south, and the 9th Tank Corps from the east. The very next day, the 9th Panzer Corps captured the crossings across the Berezina, and several more German divisions were surrounded. Rokossovsky did not waste time creating the "iron ring", rightly believing that they would not go anywhere anyway, but abandoned his reserves - the 1st Guards Cavalry and 1st Mechanized Corps - further west, to Baranovichi. The defense of the German 9th Army collapsed along the entire front. True, it is not very clear why the Germans do not like to admit that the affairs of the 4th Panzer Army in the north were no better.

Field Marshal Bush knew that his army group was in danger of total annihilation. On June 26, together with General Jordan, he flew to Hitler's Headquarters, but failed to explain anything to the Fuhrer. The only result of the visit was that Hitler removed both Bush and Jordan. Field Marshal Model was entrusted with saving the situation.

_ Around 40,000 German soldiers were surrounded in the Bobruisk area. Rokossovsky proved that understands perfectly well how to act in such a situation. Soviet artillery and aviation successfully crushed one German regiment after another, while the tanks continued to advance. Surrounded by the XXX tank corps, it made several attempts to break out of the city, but was dismembered, defeated and destroyed. In just less than a week during

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fighting, about 50,000 German soldiers were killed, and another 20,000 were captured. |

After the German front collapsed north and south of Minsk, it was possible to start solving more ambitious tasks. Soviet troops launched an offensive on the capital of Belarus, threatening to trap the remnants of the forces of Army Group Center. The outlined cauldron was much larger than all the previous ones, but here the most important successful condition of the blitzkrieg was fulfilled - the enemy's will to resist was completely broken.

Here we have to argue a little with the very authoritative historian Steven Zaloga. He claims that the German command, in desperation, resorted to the last measure and tried to use strategic aviation in order to stop the Soviet offensive. In general, he claims correctly, but he is very much mistaken in details. The fact is that the last major Luftwaffe bombing offensive on the Eastern Front began long before Operation Bagration by the forces of the Air Corps, and it had completely different goals. Operation Zaunkönig began on March 27 with raids on the Sarny railway junction in order to prevent our attack on Kovel, that is, all this had nothing to do with the battles in Belarus. The raids continued until July 1944. During these operations, the already small stocks of aviation gasoline were practically used up. Therefore, the participation of the He-177 bombers in the July battles was extremely limited, although they did one or two hits on Soviet tanks near Minsk. Moreover, German sources emphasize that although the attacks were carried out during the day, the losses were very small, since the Soviet pilots simply did not have the experience of fighting such large aircraft.

However, let us descend from heaven to sinful earth. The Red Army continued to advance on Minsk from the north and south, and attempts to stop them led to nothing. [and on July 2, fierce tank battles took place northeast of Minsk - the 5th tank division and the 505th battalion

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tanks tried to stop the 5th Guards Tank Army. Rotmistrov was unlucky again, although, perhaps, he was simply a useless general. And a marshal, even more so. Not without reason, after all, he, it was he, received a reprimand from Stalin, while Chernyakhovsky and Rokossovsky are new stars for shoulder straps. By the way, Rotmistrov managed to get the Gold Star only in 1965, during the period of the famous Brezhnev distributions. During the war years, he could not be compared with either Katukov or Lelyushenko. Rotmistrov's army again suffered significant losses, but the German tank group simply disappeared. Only 18 vehicles remained in the 5th Panzer Division, and the "tigers" were killed to the last.

Panic reigned in Minsk, very similar to what the Germans themselves saw in France in the summer of 1940. The city was filled with crowds of unarmed fugitives and staff officers, who were not at all eager to die a hero's death, defending Fester Platz Minsk, which was created by Hitler's order. On the contrary, they stormed the trains leaving for the West. Here we can throw a serious reproach to the Soviet aviation, which never managed to block the railroads.

Parts of the 2nd Panzer Corps were the first to break into the outskirts of Minsk early in the morning on July 3. In the afternoon, the 1st Guards Tank Corps entered Minsk from the southeast. 3rd and: | -th Belorussian fronts united. The resistance of the Germans in the city itself was suppressed very quickly, because, as we have already said, there was no one to defend it. The encirclement ring closed, and inside

turned out to be 5 German corps, or 25 divisions. The 9th and 4th Panzer Armies ceased to exist, as did the entire Army Group Center as a whole. It was the largest defeat of the Wehrmacht in the entire Second World War, much more terrible than Stalingrad. You can talk about further operations of the Red Army - Vilnius, Lvov-Sandomierz, Kaunas, and in general write a huge volume on the Belarusian operation. But this is already superfluous, and we will not talk about the pursuit of the defeated enemy.

In total, during Operation Bagration, the Germans lost

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about 400,000 soldiers, 10 generals were killed, and 22 were captured. You can at least count the generals, but even the Germans themselves do not know the exact figures for their total losses. Once upon a time, brave warriors dreamed of parading through Moscow, and on July 17, 1944, their dream came true. True, not exactly as it once seemed to all these "dreamers". But 56,000 German soldiers and officers, led by 19 generals, had to pass through the streets of the Soviet capital.

The last operation we would like to consider is the Iasi-Chisinau operation. In some respects it was even a purer blitzkrieg than the Bagration, since in this case the Soviet tanks were brought into a clean breach. However, let's talk about everything in order.

In the summer of 1944, the German Eastern Front was collapsing literally in all sectors, from the Barents Sea to the Black Sea. German generals still dreamed of organizing a tough defense, of transferring military operations to a positional channel, as was the case during the First World War. Hitler muttered something about fortresses and an invincible wall. Yes, the Wehrmacht tried to build a wall. Golko turned out in accordance with the famous phrase: "The wall, but rotten. Poke - and once it falls. They poked at the northern sector - Army Group Center shattered into dust. They poked in the south - the Army Group "Southern Ukraine" had no better.

By mid-August, a situation had developed in Moldova that was strikingly reminiscent of Stalingrad. The German 6th Army occupied a salient, deeply embedded in the front line, and its flanks were covered by the Romanian troops - the 3rd and 4th armies. Perhaps the Germans should have, at least out of superstition, assigned a different number to the ill-fated army, otherwise it was just asking for trouble, although now it was commanded by General Fretter-Pico, and not at all by Paulus.

The idea of the operation was simple - to strike at two far-distant sectors of the front: northwest of Yass and south of Bender, where the Romanian troops held the defense. In case of success, the 6th Army in full strength found itself in a cauldron and could share the fate of its predecessor. The Soviet command concentrated significant forces and

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Defensive lines of the Nazi oisk

The directions of the strikes of the Soviet troops on August 20-24

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Line of the front to the end of August 24

The direction of the strikes of the Soviet troops on August 25-29

Line of the front and the position of the Soviet troops by the end of August 29 Actions of the Duivy military fleet

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Iasi-Kishinev operation

in the breakthrough areas created a multiple superiority in manpower, tanks and artillery. For example, it was possible to increase the density of artillery to 280 barrels per kilometer of the front, which they had not even dared to think about before. The main difference from the Byelorussian operation was that in the southern sector of the front the terrain was much more favorable for the use of tanks, so 1870 tanks and self-propelled guns were assembled here.

Offensive. both fronts began on August 20 after a powerful artillery preparation. The artillery strike was so strong that in some places the first strip of German defense was swept away. Here are the memories of one of the participants. offensive nicknames:

“When we moved forward, the terrain was black to a depth of about ten kilometers. The enemy's defense was practically destroyed. Enemy trenches, dug to their full height, turned into shallow ditches, no more than knee-deep. The dugouts were destroyed. Sometimes dugouts miraculously survived, but the enemy soldiers who were in them were dead, although there were no signs of wounds. Death came from high air pressure after shell explosions and suffocation.

The troops of the 2nd Ukrainian Front, General Malinovsky, broke through the main line of defense on the very first day, and the 27th Army broke through the second one too. In one day, our troops advanced 16 kilometers. The commander of Army Group South Ukraine, General Frisner, later wrote that chaos had begun in the disposition of his armies. In order to somehow stop the rapidly developing offensive, he threw 3 infantry and 1 tank divisions into a counterattack near Iasi. But this attack was not successful. In the middle of the day, Malinovsky brought the 6th Panzer Army into the breach, which struck at the third and last line of defense of the Germans.

It is completely incomprehensible for what reasons, but the Soviet Military Encyclopedia suddenly starts talking complete nonsense, talking about the second day of the operation. Say, “the enemy pulled units of 12 divisions, including two tank divisions, to the breakthrough area of the 2nd Ukrainian Front, and

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tried to stop his advance with counterattacks. Yes, Frisner did not have such forces. He does not mention in a single word about any counterattacks on 2] August. On the contrary: his mouth, all his thoughts were focused on one thing - how to organize a more or less orderly withdrawal of troops beyond the Prut or even the Danube. Frisner did not want his divisions to share the fate of Field Marshal Bush's troops, so he spit on the vaunted German discipline, spit on the orders of the Fuhrer and ordered the withdrawal of troops. But it was already too late. Soviet tanks ended up deep in the German rear, cutting off the headquarters of the corps from the headquarters of the 6th Army. General Fretter-Pico did not want to join the commander of the first 6th Army and hastily moved his headquarters further to the rear. So hastily that then he had to wash off the accusations of fleeing from the battlefield for a long time. Frisner tries to justify him, but he himself immediately writes that the headquarters of the army group was forced to take command of the divisions. This is not done from a good life. |

On the front of the Romanian 3rd Army, our offensive also developed successfully. On August 22, the 3rd Ukrainian Front finally cut off the German 6th Army from the Romanian 3rd Army. Army General Tolbukhin correctly assessed the potential of both, and therefore decided to leave the Romanians to themselves, concentrating the main efforts on actions against the right flank of the German army. The 4th Guards and 7th Mechanized Corps were thrown into the gap, which began a rapid advance to the west, deviating slightly to the north in order to meet Malinovsky's units on the banks of the Prut. Already on August 23, Malinovsky's 18th tank corps captured Khushi, and Tolbukhin's mechanized corps captured the crossings at Leuseni and Leovo. On the third day of the operation, the encirclement of the German 6th Army was completed! And Guderian himself would envy the pace of advancement of Soviet tanks.

By the way, after the war, another battle broke out near Iasi - the battle of memoirs, in which Guderian and Frisner

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tried hard to shift the blame for this catastrophe on each other. However, we will be indulgent to the panzer generals. None of them could have saved the situation, and in general, one should not talk about German mistakes (and who doesn't make them?), but about the correct decisions of Malinovsky and Tolbukhin. The fact is that this time the mistakes of the Korsun Shevchenko operation were not repeated. The 6th Panzer Army, without being delayed or distracted by any "encirclement fronts", continued to develop the offensive to the south, in the direction of Bucharest. Did you want blitzkrieg? You got it!

Meanwhile, the troops of the Soviet 46th Army crossed the Dniester and began to advance in a southeasterly direction. On August 23, when the ring around the main pocket was closed, the 46th Army, as they say, in passing, slammed the Romanian 3rd Army, which capitulated with practically no resistance. Tolbukhin looked into the water when he did not want to allocate large forces to fight it. 3 divisions and | the brigade surrendered. This turned out to be the last straw that broke the determination of the Rumanian ruling circles to continue the struggle. On the evening of August 23, a "coup d'état" took place in Bucharest, as our historians sometimes write. But what kind of revolution was it? King Mihai deposed Prime Minister Antonescu and appointed another general, C. Sanatescu, in his place. At 11.30 p.m., the king's declaration on the cessation of hostilities against the Allies was broadcast on the radio. The Soviet command did not count on such a result of the operation - Germany had lost one more ally. Even here, however, the SVE could not resist telling another tale about an "anti-fascist uprising led by the Communist Party." The funny thing is that modern historians repeat this tale, although literally a couple of pages later they absolutely seriously write that the Communist Party of Romania numbered less than 1000 people and did not have any influence.

In general, by August 23, the inner front of the encirclement was formed, in which there were 18 German divisions. About how they were defeated, General Frisner

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modestly silent. In general, he shifts all the blame for the defeat of the 6th Army onto the Romanians and ... Guderian. He himself is not at all to blame, and the Soviet troops seemed to be present at this, nothing more.

The large cauldron immediately fell apart into two smaller ones, the liquidation of which was completed on 27 and 29 August. After that, the operation could be considered completed. The Iasi-Kishinev operation is characterized by very small losses of the Soviet troops - only about 67,000 killed and wounded, while the Germans lost about 250,000 people. This offensive also had more distant consequences - it opened the way for the Soviet troops to the borders of Bulgaria. As a result, on September 5, the Soviet Union declared war on Bulgaria, but already on September 9, this "war without shots" ended.

In the autumn of 1944, the OKH had to do the thankless task for the second time - to re-form the 6th Army. By the way, few people know, but in the last days of the fighting in Stalingrad, Hitler ordered to collect one soldier from each of the encircled divisions so that they would become the "core" of the new 6th "avengers" army. Now there was no time to engage in such nonsense, and the army was formed around the headquarters of Fretter-Pico, who managed to escape. It will be interesting to compare the composition of this ill-fated army in the various periods of its existence.

November 19, 1942, on the day of the start of the Soviet offensive near Stalingrad: XU Panzer Corps (60th and 3rd motorized, 16th Panzer, 94th Infantry Divisions); [I] Corps (389, 295, 71, 79th Infantry, 100th Jaeger, 24th Tank Divisions); USh corps (113th, 76th infantry divisions); X] corps (44th, 384th infantry divisions), the 14th tank division is directly subordinated to the army headquarters.

The reconstituted army on April 9, 1943: KhUP corps (302, 306, 294th infantry divisions); XXX corps (336th, 16th motorized, 15th airfield divisions); XXI tank corps (11th infantry, 454th, 444th security divisions); corps group "Mitsch" (335th, 304th infantry, 3rd mountain rifle divisions); the 79th and 17th infantry, 23rd tank divisions are subordinated to the army headquarters.

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August 15, 1944:

UP Corps (Romanian 14th Infantry, 370th, 106th Infantry Divisions); [D] corps (294, 320, 384, 161st infantry divisions); XXX Corps (384th, 257th, 15th, 306th, 302nd Infantry Divisions); XXXU Corps (258, 282, 335, 62nd Infantry Divisions); The 13th Panzer Division is directly subordinated to the army headquarters.

September 16, 1944:

GUP tank corps (76th infantry, 4th mountain rifle, remnants of the 20th tank division), 8th SS cavalry division "Florian Geyer", group "Winkler". That is, otav-gustovsky

there is nothing left of the composition.

As we can see, immediately after the defeat at Stalingrad, the dead divisions were not restored, despite the theatrical gesture of the Fuhrer. On the other hand, it is pleasant to note that the 384th Infantry Division fell under distribution twice - near Stalingrad and near Chisinau. Well no luck. However, we are not

how much you got distracted.

Summary. The battles of 1944 showed that the Soviet command had gradually mastered the art of blitzkrieg —swift cutting blows, encirclement of the enemy armies and their subsequent destruction, with the simultaneous development of success by tank units. This detail is especially important, since only the summer offensives demonstrated this in full. During the winter operations, our command still paid too much attention to encircled groups. In the summer of 1944, the Soviet command succeeded in several operations in the style of a classic blitzkrieg, which are worthy of being written into any textbook.

All British historians foam at the mouth reject the vile accusations that Montgomery knew nothing about tank warfare. Indeed, how can a field marshal

Sir Bernard Law Montgomery, Viscount Alamein, Knight of the Order of the Garter, Knight Grand Cross of the Order of the Bath, and so on, and so on, and so on, to understand nothing about tank warfare? He saw her through and through and foresaw to the ground. True, the result for the British army was more than deplorable. And repeatedly. The victories of the field marshal cost her especially hard, the army suffered defeats somehow easier.

The British 8th Army received the first crushing blow from Montgomery near El Alamein. When else does the winner lose 500 tanks, and the loser lose half as much? Further, Montgomery continued to improve his military leadership. The next opportunity presented itself to him in the spring of 1943, during the last fighting in Africa. Of course, we will by no means believe the envious Americans who claimed: "This is just a small man who once hit a big jackpot. He will not risk failure after success, will not help anyone and thinks only of himself. Indeed, only a born commander would dare to throw two whole battalions into the breakthrough of the fortified line, while two brigades would be waiting to enter the breakthrough ...

However, we have somewhat delayed the introduction. One way or another, Montgomery's troops managed to get to Normandy. How this happened - history does not know, but it was only in Normandy that the Allies in general and Montgomery in particular had a good opportunity to conduct a blitzkrieg operation for the first time in the entire war. After all, it was there that the Germans in 1940 showed how it was all done. And if in Afrika Montgomery this did not work out, despite the convincing lessons of Rommel, then here the shadow of Father Gam ... pah, Guderian should have acted as a teacher.

This story began on June 6, 1944, when the Allied troops landed on the coast of Normandy. According to the plan of the operation, the English 1st Corps was supposed to capture the city of Caen on the very first day of the operation. And if the German coastal defenses in the English landing site collapsed almost immediately (the film "Saving Private Ryan" shows

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If the events in the Omaha sector, and not the Gold or Juno, where the British landed), Montgomery for some reason was in no hurry to advance deep into the peninsula. The generals subordinate to him correctly understood their commander and were also in no hurry. As a result, the British poked around on the shore almost until evening, and when they finally got ready to move to Caen, the German 21st Panzer Division managed to pull up there. By the way, the only one in all of Normandy. However, let's be fair, with the development of success it was bad not only for the British, but also for the Americans.

English historians assure us that the British infantry could not walk as much as 10 kilometers from the coast to Caen during the day. Okay, let's trust them. But what were the tanks doing at that time? The 8th and 27th armored brigades were landed on the coast, each of which had more than 200 tanks. A little background: the German 21st Panzer Division had only 160 tanks and assault guns. The most offensive thing for the British commanders was that it was now extremely difficult for them to come up with an excuse for their too slow advance. They were armed with Shermans for a long time, and not the famous Matildas, so it was impossible to refer to low-speed and poor maneuverability. The position of the British was made even more difficult by complete and unconditional air supremacy. And if British aviation did not know how to support its troops, then it learned to hunt for enemy columns. During the day, the 21st Panzer Division lost 70 tanks out of 124, but the British failed to capture the city of Caen. This small episode is very characteristic of Montgomery's actions - exhaustingly methodical AND extremely cautious. I suspect that if Montgomery instead of O'Connor had commanded the army in Libya in 1940, the British would not have achieved any success there.

By the way, according to the plan of the operation, on the very first day of the landing, it was supposed to occupy the small town of Villers-Bocage. If this had been done, the British army would have avoided a serious embarrassment, and one of the German tank aces would have lost a fantastic victory. The British reached Villers-Bocage only on the morning of June 13, this was done by the 7th bro.

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a non-tank division that Montgomery considered his "best player". What is this player worth, it turned out just a few hours later.

The vanguard of the 22nd Armored Brigade (by the way, a small clarification: too many sources incorrectly name the affected English unit. We have already written about the British habit of pompous names. So, it was the "A" squadron of the 4th Regiment of the Yeomen of the County of London.) decided to make a short stop in the town, which was seen by SS Obersturmführer Michael Wittmann. In his opinion, the British decided too early that the war was won, and he undertook to explain to the British their error. Wittmann's "Tiger" broke into the town, firing right and left. The result was the destruction | | tanks (5 Cromwells, | Sherman Firefly, 3 M5A1 Honey, 2 command tanks) and 10 armored personnel carriers. For this achievement, Wittmann was awarded the Swords to his Knight's Cross with Oak Leaves and received the title of Hauptsturmführer. For this same achievement, Lieutenant Colonel Cranly received nothing. Absolutely nothing. How can such an unfortunate trifle affect the biography of Arthur, Viscount Cranly, who considers his family by name since the thirteenth century?! .

And now we will make a small jump in time and fast forward to the end of July 1944. All the plans and schedules of Operation Overlord flew head over heels, but still, they fumbled for a long, very long time; The Allies launched their offensive from a spot in Normandy. On July 25, American troops attacked Saint-Lo from a line that was planned to be reached on the fifth day of the operation, that is, June 11.

Here it would be appropriate to refer to the memoirs of General Omar Bradley, who commanded the American 12th Army Group.

"As soon as the plan for Operation Cobra was ready, I told Patton about it, since he was to join the fighting after it was deployed. July 18, two days before we intended to present our plan to correspondents stationed with the 1st Army, Dixon,

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the head of intelligence of the 1st Army, came to me, purple with indignation.

"We learned from our correspondents, General," he said, "that Patton told the 3rd Army press about Operation Cobra.

— Damn it! I exclaimed and rushed to the telephone, but George was not there.

Patton himself called me and offered his apologies and explanations. Yes, he told the headquarters about the plan for the breakthrough of the 1st Army, but the correspondents were not allowed to this meeting. The plan was divulged to reporters by his press officer."

Such were the Americans' ideas about military secrets. But even more surprising is that the vaunted Abwehr never managed to take advantage of such unprecedented slovenliness.

The offensive began with air raids. On July 24, Allied strategic bombers bombed the American 30th Infantry Division. On July 25, Operation Cobra began. The first strike was made by P-47 Thunderbolt fighter-bombers. Behind him appeared 1495 heavy bombers B-17 and B-24, which dropped 3370 tons of bombs. Behind

they flew 380 B-26 medium bombers. This blow was truly devastating, in the strip of 7000 yards to 2500 yards nothing survived. True, here's the trouble - part of this strip was again covered by American troops. The result was consistent with the effort - more than 600 were killed, including the commander of the Allied ground forces, Lieutenant General Leslie McNair. The most interesting thing is that even after that, the command of the British Royal Air Force stubbornly insisted that they did not need a battlefield aircraft. It is not surprising that the American UP Corps managed to advance no more than 1.5 kilometers. It seems that the Americans had a very peculiar idea of the pace of operations, because the commander of the corps, General Collins, was nicknamed "Lightning".

One should not be particularly surprised by this development of events. The fact is that neither the British nor the Americans

considered it necessary to create tank formations at the level of corps and armies. The UP corps had 4 infantry and 2 tank divisions, U - 4 infantry and 1 tank. Yes, the level of mechanization of the Anglo-American corps far exceeded that of the rest of the armies, and the prefix "mechanized" was simply meaningless, it goes without saying. However, the fact is that the level of mechanization of troops increased their mobility, but not the striking power of the corps. They could effectively advance after breaking through the enemy defenses, but, faced with little or no serious resistance, the American breakthrough stalled by itself. The situation was further complicated by the absence of battlefield aviation. More than once or twice, American strategic bombers dropped tens of tons of bombs on the heads of their own soldiers before the command realized that attack aircraft were needed not only on the atolls of the Pacific Ocean, but also on the fields of Europe. British air marshals failed to understand this either during the war or after. The next day, Collins' corps again attacked the positions of the Panzer Training Division in front of him. But the American 3rd Panzer Division was stopped by a counterattack by two companies of the 2nd SS Panzer Division Das Reich. On July 27, the Americans continued their offensive, and the Germans could no longer hold it back for a very simple reason — the Americans deployed their own division against each German battalion. Against 2 corps in the offensive zone, the Germans had only 2 incomplete divisions. As a result, the American 4th Panzer Division reached Coutances by the evening of July 28, posing a threat of encirclement of the German EHKH corps. General von Choltitz decided to withdraw his troops before it was too late. The Americans had every chance to cut off and press 7 divisions of the corps to the sea, but General Collins did not pass the exam in the subject of "blitzkrieg". Instead of building on success, he stopped the tanks and at the same time did not even try to bring up the infantry to strengthen the vanguard. The general's order was simple: everyone stand in their place. As a result, part of the German forces seeped through the thin

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semicircle, part of it simply moved south. It is not for nothing that General Omar Bradley, who commanded the American 1st Army, in his memoirs only talks about the breakthrough of the German front, getting off with an indistinct tongue twister in relation to subsequent events. The degree of misunderstanding by the Americans of the nature of the war is best shown by the very plan of Operation Cobra - after the breakthrough of the German front, a period of consolidation of their positions was envisaged.

However, the German defense collapsed, and the Americans, willy-nilly, had to move to the pursuit phase. However, here, too, the actions of the Americans were distinguished by their unique originality. Field Marshal von Kluge, who commanded the German troops in the west, feared an attack to the east, to Mayen and Alençon, which would lead to the encirclement of his forces, but the Americans moved south, where the only enemy could be the garrisons of ports on the Atlantic coast of France. But Americans admire this aimless and senseless "running south." It was he who brought new glory to George Patton, who, according to American historians, is one of the three greatest commanders: Alexander the Great, Caesar and Patton. As they say, comments are superfluous.

And yet the left flank of Army Group B was hanging in the air. Something had to be done to rectify the situation, and

Adolf Hitler found a way out. Instead of withdrawing to the line of the Seine River, he decided at all costs to keep the enemy in Normandy with the help of a powerful counterattack. Thus was born the plan for Operation Lüttich. The KhGUP tank corps, consisting of the 2nd and 116th tank divisions, was supposed to break through along the Vir River to the Atlantic coast and cut off Patton's divisions that had gone far to the south. It was to be supported by the remnants of the 2nd SS Panzer Division "Das Reich" and the newly arrived 9th Panzer Division. It was also supposed to remove the 1st SS Panzer Division "Leibstandarte" from the front near Kahn and include it in the strike group. The offensive was supposed to start on August 6 from the area of Morten.

A complex chess game began, consisting of de

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but, middleship and endgame. Black, in the sense of the Germans, conceived an adventurous attack right from the opening without developing a piece. Hitler had lost all sense of reality long ago, so no one is surprised by his order: "The outcome of the battle for France depends on the success of the offensive. The High Command "West" received a unique opportunity, which will not happen again, to break through the enemy's too extended front and thus completely change the situation. Blitzkrieg, you know. Recall that at that very time the Byelorussian operation was ending on the Eastern Front and the Iasi-Chisinau operation was beginning. In such a situation one can only dream of decisive offensives. Therefore, Kluge looked at things more realistically and believed that this blow would allow him to more calmly withdraw the troops behind the Seine. In a telephone conversation with the field marshal, Hitler promised to hand over to him 60 Panthers, which were in reserve near Paris, and 80 T-[Us] from the [1st Panzer Division stationed in southern France. Already from these figures it becomes clear what insignificant forces the Germans had in France. |

The American command foresaw the possibility of this counterattack, but did not know the details. At the last moment, late in the evening of August 6, General von Funk, the commander of the KhGUP Panzer Corps, demanded by telephone that the commander of the 7th Army, General Hausser, postpone the attack, since the 1st SS Panzer Division did not have time to arrive at Morten. At the same time, he demanded to remove the commander of the 116th Panzer Count von Schwerin, who refused to transfer the tank battalion of the 2nd division. The operation has not yet begun, and squabbles have already broken out among the German generals. Hausser refused to postpone the start of the offensive, as he knew the importance the Führer attached to it, but allowed Funk to delay by 2 hours. For the attack, the Germans managed to scrape together a total of 120 tanks and 32 assault guns. The attack was planned to start at night in order to avoid allied air strikes. The German blitzkrieg was somehow one-legged.

Immediately after midnight, the Germans went on the offensive without prior artillery preparation. In the south, the 2nd Panzer Division

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The SS Das Reich managed to break into Morten and moved on. The 2nd Panzer Division, which dealt the main blow, managed to advance 8 kilometers, but was stopped by the 119th Infantry Division. The 116th Panzer Division, advancing in the north, simply failed to launch an attack. The 84th Infantry Division was supposed to occupy its sector of the front, but Count von Schwerin suddenly began to doubt: would the infantry, in which case, be able to withstand the pressure of the Americans? And as a result, the offensive was canceled. Previously, nothing like this in the German army simply could not happen. As a result, Operation Lüttich failed without actually starting. Out of 6 battle groups, only 3 attacked at the scheduled time, and the fourth went over to the offensive with a delay of 5 hours.

At first, the Americans took what was happening quite calmly. The message of the headquarters of the UP corps to the headquarters of the army was pure truth: "Uncoordinated attacks by individual units." Only after dawn did the true extent become clear.

German offensive, and then Collins panicked. He was especially alarmed by the advance of the tanks of the 2nd division, which threatened to break through the front. Collins threw in front of her first 3rd Panzer, and then also the 2nd Panzer Division. At the same time, he began to push reserves to the front line, concentrating all his 5 infantry and 2 tank divisions near Morten.

With the onset of dawn, the Germans stopped and waited for the inevitable air attacks. Rocket-armed British Typhoons and American Gunderbolts entered the business. The pilots made about 500 sorties and happily reported the destruction of 120 German tanks, that is, they completely destroyed the German strike group, although the Germans themselves did not notice this. However, the Allied aviation still played its role, stopping the enemy. As a result, the German offensive turned into a series of local clashes.

Hitler was furious because Operation Lüttich, on which he had placed such high hopes, had failed. He blamed the failure on Field Marshal Kluge. Count von Schwerin also fell under the hot hand, which

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Rogo was removed from command. Still cherishing hopes for a grand success, the Fuhrer ordered the 9th, 10th and [2nd SS Panzer Divisions to be moved to Mortain, removing them from the front of the British army. Thus, the notorious "Falaise bag" gradually began to form.

The next move in this difficult opening was made by the allies. On August 8, the 1st Canadian Army went on the offensive, its target was just Falaise. Kluge had to take hasty measures, since Hitler left this sector of the front without tank units. The 10th SS Panzer Division "Fruuds Berg" had already departed for Morten, but Kluge managed to stop the other two divisions. The Germans planned to resume their attack on Morten on the evening of August 9 (again under the cover of

`darkness to hide from fighter-bombers

kov allies), but they had to make a waiting move, postponing it for a day. Although the Canadians were stopped, there was every reason to suspect that the offensive would continue. And then the Americans made a move on the opposite flank. Patton's army occupied Le Mans, with the result that a deep coverage of the German forces in Normandy began to emerge, although the Americans did not at all strive for this. Kluge was forced to hold up the 9th Panzer Division at Alençon.

In the meantime, Hitler started a complex restructuring of the figures. In Russian, this is called "drawing organizational conclusions and taking action". To begin with, General Funk, who commanded the offensive, was removed, and General Eberbach, commander of the West Panzer Group, took over the leadership. But Eberbach decided to postpone a new offensive until 20 August. The first attempt of the German blitzkrieg on the Western Front failed miserably, the inequality of forces was too great. However, she gave some results. Parts of the 5th Panzer and 7th Armies themselves climbed into the bag in the Falaise area. |

However, it took a long time for General Bradley, who became commander of the 12th Army Group, to realize this. The meaning of what was happening did not reach the commander of the 3rd Army, the "brilliant commander" Patton. He

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continued to drive his troops in various directions, seeking to occupy as much territory as possible, and constantly demanded reinforcements from Bradley "to secure their flanks." Instead of delivering one powerful blow, he MOVED HIS troops, as they say, across the entire horizon. The XU corps was advancing to the east, the XX corps to the southeast, the USh corps was moving to the south, it is not very clear why. In his book, General Bradley provides a map showing the situation in France on August 14, where the position of Patton's army is proudly called "the front line." But after all, the front lines simply must be two sides, and in this case the second

the German side was missing. Patton's divisions rolled across France in walking mode. And taking into account the uprisings of the French Resistance flaring up here and there, it can be said that Patton managed to realize the pink dream of Soviet pre-war theorists - a deep operation in its crystal clear form. It was a deep breakthrough of mechanized forces, which immediately led to political results - the overthrow of the "hated anti-people regime." Here is such a strange irony of fate.

Sometimes on the map of the theater of operations there is such a picture that even an American general can understand. And so, during a meeting between Bradley and Eisenhower, it was decided to try to close the trap into which the Germans themselves climbed. Just in case, the Americans consulted by telephone with Montgomery, who agreed to the change of plans. However, not wanting to lose his piece of laurel, Monti demanded that the Canadians continue their advance, and the pocket was formed by a joint attack on Falaise from the north and south. There remained a mere trifle - to find the strength for a decisive blow. In the Soviet or German armies, this would not have been any problem. Our commanders could allocate a tank army, the Germans - a tank corps approximately equal in strength, but for the Western Allies this was an intractable task, because they had neither one nor the other.

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As we have already said, General Patton did not understand anything about what was happening, therefore, even after receiving an unequivocal order from Eisenhower, he tried to attack in two directions at the same time. Part of the forces of the XU corps (but only a part!) he sent to Alençon in order to go from there to Argentan. As a result, only the American 5th Panzer and the French 2nd Panzer Division reached Alençon. Stubborn battles ensued, as the Germans were not at all disposed to give up the city. The fighting went on for two days, after which the allies managed to break through to Argentan. The fighting around this city was no less tenacious, but when the French did enter Argentan on August 13, the German tank reserves drove them out almost immediately.

The actions of Bradley and Montgomery at this time are marked by great thought. The Germans, as a result of their unsuccessful offensive, were deeply bogged down on the Vire-Mortain-Baranton front.

For better or worse, Patton's 3rd Army was advancing on Argentan, so a powerful blow from Caen to Falaise and further to Argentan cut off two German armies. Instead, the combined forces of the two army groups on August 10 launched a frontal offensive, which, on the contrary, squeezed

Germans from the emerging boiler.

And yet the position of the Germans continued to deteriorate. Hitler stubbornly clung to the idea of a counterattack and did not allow the withdrawal of troops to the Seine line, although this counterattack completely lost all meaning. Model and Eberbach were given the difficult task of salvaging what could be salvaged without angering the Führer too much. Therefore, Eberbach transferred the 116th Panzer Division to Argentan and once again postponed the start of the offensive, now until August 14th. What the general actually thought remains a mystery. I don't want to indiscriminately blame all the German generals, but if the head of the OKW already bears the affectionate nickname Lakeitel, this also says something. Eberbach wanted to strike from the east, cutting off and destroying the two allied panzer divisions that had broken through. But, having gathered the 1st SS Panzer, 2nd and 116th Panzer Divisions near Argentan, Eberbach

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found that he had only 70 tanks, while each of the Allied divisions had more than 200 tanks.

But on August 13, everything turned upside down. The High Command of the Allies once again showed that the laws of war for him remain a mystery behind seven seals. No attempts to find a more or less satisfactory explanation for what happened next are not successful, and the explanations of the many star generals of the OJ Agtu sound like childish babble. However, here is Patton's now famous telephone message: "Our units are in Argentan. Let me march on Falaise, and we will throw the English into the sea, giving them a second Dunkirk." When it became known, Eisenhower had to make tremendous efforts to hush up the scandal that broke out.

By August 13, about 30 kilometers remained between the Canadian and American troops located in Falaise and Argentan. It remained to make one last small effort, and in the bag would be 2 army headquarters, 4 corps headquarters and 15 German divisions. It was hard to believe that Montgomery's troops, moving at a snail's pace, would be able to close the throat of the bag, but the Americans could do it. O

What does one of the main characters, General Omar Bradley, say about all this? |

"While we were impatiently waiting for Monty in Argentan, the enemy reinforced the defenses of the corridor. The vanguards of the tank troops and SS units were already withdrawing through the corridor, heading towards the Seine. But instead of redoubling efforts and cutting off the Germans' escape route, Monty increased pressure on the enemy who remained in the western part of the pocket. He did not close the gap at Falaise, but continued to push the enemy back to the Seine. If Monty's tactics puzzled me, Eisenhower was simply frightened by them. And at the command post of the 3rd Army, where stricken officers watched helplessly as the prey eluded them, Patton cursed Montgomery for his blunder. George was doubly annoyed because he himself was not allowed to close the passage. But Monty never objected, and I never offered to close the passage between

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Argentan and Falaise by the forces of only American troops. I was quite content with our original task and did not want to take on another.

Although Patton could close that narrow neck, I doubted he could keep it. Nineteen German divisions panicked to break out of the trap, and George, with four divisions, already blocked the three main escape routes through Alençon, Sey and Argentan. If he had advanced his troops to Falaise, he would have had to cover an additional 65 kilometers. The rapidly retreating enemy could not only

break through, but also crush Patton. I, of course, preferred to hold firmly on the line at Argentan, instead of marching on Falaise at the risk of breaking my neck.

Besides, I didn't want to risk a clash between the two armies, which could happen if Patton moved on Falaise. Any oncoming movement becomes a dangerous and uncontrollable maneuver if each of the parties is not stopped at a certain line in accordance with a pre-agreed plan. The indiscriminate penetration of the Americans into the battle formations of the advancing troops of Montgomery could easily lead to dangerous confusion, since the British could take us for the Germans. However, having detained Patton in Argentan, I did not inform Montgomery of this. This decision was mine alone. It never went beyond my command post."

I leave you to judge. A brilliant opportunity to destroy two German armies was lost. However, the fanfare and braggart Patton did not need extra invitations and willingly turned the XU Corps to the east. The laurels of the liberator of Paris awaited him for the witches. But the most offensive for him is that he never received these laurels. Violating all orders, the French tank division of General Leclerc was the first to enter Paris.

However, the Allies found a very influential ally, if one allows such a tautology. Hitler abandoned the idea of cutting off Patton's entire army, but stubbornly continued to demand that XU be cut off, surrounded and destroyed.

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frame. How Eberbach, whose forces had already been reduced to 60 tanks, could do this, no one thought. At the same time, the Fuhrer once again forbade the withdrawal of troops from the Falaise bag. A completely insane, incredible situation was created: the Germans got into the encirclement up to their ears and stubbornly refused to save their armies, but the allies, with even greater perseverance and stubbornness, refused to encircle and destroy these armies. The chess game, which at first developed more or less normally, turned into real giveaway.

On August 16, the Canadians crawled to Falaise and occupied it. The neck of the bag narrowed to 20 kilometers. The commander of Army Group B, Field Marshal Kluge, was spinning like a hot frying pan. He radioed the OKW that his tank units had neither tanks nor fuel, so there could be no talk of any offensive actions, one should only think about salvation. Without waiting for permission from the command, Kluge, by his authority, ordered the withdrawal of troops from the Falaise pocket to begin. At the same time, the Germans managed to snap back for the last time. The remnants of the 2nd SS Panzer Division "Das Reich" and the 116th Panzer Division threw back the American 90th Infantry Division with a desperate blow, slightly expanding the neck.

Late in the evening of August 16, the Germans began to withdraw troops from the bag. There were 9 infantry and 6 tank divisions. By this time, the width of the Falaise bag was reduced to 25 kilometers, and it was shot through by allied artillery. However, Hitler decided to further complicate the situation of his generals, and at the most tense moment removed the commander of Army Group B, Field Marshal von Kluge, replacing him with Field Marshal Model, and this was done in the most unceremonious manner. On the evening of August 17, Model arrived at the headquarters of the army group, bringing the order to remove Kluge. He correctly understood the hint and committed suicide the next day.

The model, nicknamed the "lion of defense", had to once again accomplish the impossible. He allowed his divisions to abandon their heavy weapons and equipment and flee.

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The allied artillery fired on the German columns, the fighter-bombers hunted down every sighted vehicle, but the infantry and tankers, for some incomprehensible reason, coolly followed this flight. A timid attempt by the 1st Polish Panzer Division

blocking the neck led to the fact that, as a result of a counterattack by parts of the P parachute corps of General Meindl, the Poles themselves were surrounded.

The exact numbers of German losses are still unknown. The Germans are believed to have lost about 10,000 killed and 40,000 captured. The most curious thing is that the losses of the allies turned out to be only slightly less, if not less at all. The fact is that the "winners" concealed their losses much more diligently than the defeated ones. It is only known that on one northern face of the bag, the Allies lost about 7,000 people killed. The losses of Patton's army, operating on the southern face, remained unknown. |

Summary. During the fighting in Normandy, a situation arose three times when one side or another could try to conduct a blitzkrieg operation. And all three times this opportunity was missed, although each time the reason was different. At the beginning of Operation Cobra, after the breakthrough of American troops to the south, none of the American generals simply thought of the possibility of encircling and destroying the German ones. troops that had a completely open flank and rear. Patton was too tempted to occupy as much territory as possible. An attempt by the Germans to carry out Operation Lutgikh in order to cut off Patton's 3rd Army, which had broken through, failed for the most banal reason - a lack of forces. In addition, the German command, which was completely uncharacteristic for it, failed to realize its own plans due to confusion and chaos in the control system. The third and most brilliant opportunity to encircle and destroy two whole German armies presented itself to the Allies as a result of Hitler's too stubborn desire to carry out Operation Lüttich. It was the first and only

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tea on the Western Front, when the Allies could make a real cauldron, but for completely incomprehensible and inexplicable reasons, this was not done. It is time to suspect outright treason on the part of these generals, but after all, two commanders of army groups, three commanders of armies, and even three commanders of armies, could not turn out to be traitors. Supreme Commander to boot

Chapter 15

I wonder if anyone noticed that in the whole of 1944, the Wehrmacht on the Eastern Front did not once try to conduct a major operation? The Germans only defended themselves, almost always unsuccessfully, as we have already noted, and all their active actions were reduced to tactical counterattacks. It was tactical, because even these attacks could not correct the operational situation. In the West, however, their actions were also of a forcedly passive nature, Germany felt more and more acutely a shortage of forces. However, even in such a situation, the Germans (to be more precise, Hitler) tried twice to turn the tide of hostilities, moreover, to throw the allies into the sea. The first was the completely unsuccessful Operation Luttich, which failed without actually starting. The second was Operation Wacht am Rhein, the winter offensive in the Ardennes, which pretty much rattled the nerves of the Americans and badly damaged relations between them and the British. But let's talk about everything in order.

As early as September 6, 1944, the Chief of Staff of the OKH, General Joll, who always felt Hitler's moods subtly, presented to the Fuhrer his thoughts on the "decisive major offensive in the West." However, Jodl outlined the conditions under which the operation could be successful, and it immediately became clear that the planned offensive had very little chance of success, because the main thing was to eliminate the opposition of allied aircraft in any way. AND

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nevertheless, the formation of a special army for this offensive immediately began, it was called the 6th Panzer. A small clarification: it became the 6th SS Panzer Army only in January 1945, although it is most often called that way. The German generals considered several offensive options and chose a middle one: to break through the Allied front with a blow from the Aachen region and Northern Luxembourg and with a swift throw of tank units

go to Antwerp. This would make it possible to cut off the English 21st Army Group and give it a second Dunkirk. Yes, the German generals were not going to waste time on trifles.

|| In November, a special group headed by the same Jodl was created in the OKW, which was already engaged in the detailed development of the plan for the operation "Watch on the Rhine". The plan of operation was simple. It was assumed that on the second day of the offensive the strike force would reach the Meuse River and create two bridgeheads on its western bank, between Liège and Namur. After that, the tank divisions will reach Amsterdam over the next 5 days and cut the Allied armies in two. The task was made easier by the fact that on the 130-kilometer front in the Ardennes only 4 American divisions of the 1st Army of General Hodges were defending. However, the position of the Germans was also far from brilliant. Rather, it was even bad. ° Formally, the OKW intended to assemble 9 tank and 13 infantry divisions. But what were these divisions! Most of the infantry consisted of the so-called Volks-Grenadier divisions, which in all respects were inferior to ordinary infantry. At the same time, they should not be confused with the Volksstorm, which was simply a militia. The Germans began to form Volksgrenadier divisions in the fall of 1944 after Operation Bagration, when Army Group Center was destroyed. Their main difference was that they had only 6 infantry battalions instead of 9 in normal divisions, and their main armament was light infantry. In addition, a significant part of the personnel did not have combat experience.

Only on October 22, the plan is introduced to the operation plan.

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Field Marshal Rundstedt, who was blowing the Western Front, and Field Marshal Model, commander of Army Group B, who were to deal with its implementation. Each of them proposed his own version of the plan of operation, which Jodl, of course, hacked to death. According to his plan, the main blow was delivered by the 6th Panzer Army, which was supposed to cross the Meuse near Liege. The basis of its striking power was the 1st SS Panzer Corps, but, alas, it did not even remotely resemble the tank fist advancing near Kursk. It included the 1st and 12th SS Panzer Divisions, the 12th and 277th Volksgrenadier Divisions, and, for no apparent reason, the 3rd Airborne Division. That is, his infantry divisions were frankly weak, and Gruppenführer Hermann Priss could not seriously count on them. The 5th Panzer Army was advancing to the left and had the task of covering the 6th Panzer Army from an Allied attack from the west. The state of the 5th Panzer is best indicated by the fact that its EXU Panzer Corps included only two Volks Grenadier divisions and not a single Panzer division! The weakest 7th Army operated even further to the left and had the task of covering the flanks of the shock group from the south. At the same time, General Jodl, with the frankness of despair, wrote that the goals of the operation "do not correspond to the available forces." After all, according to the calculations of the OKW, [5 tank and 23 infantry divisions] should have participated in an offensive of this magnitude. The Germans did not have even half of this number. |

Hitler signed the counteroffensive directive on 10 November. Just the day before, Generals Bradley (commander of the 12th Army Group) and Eisenhower (commander-in-chief of the Allies in the European theater of operations) visited the headquarters of the commander of the USH corps, General Middleton. It was his corps that occupied positions in the Ardennes. During the meeting, all three admitted that the front of the American divisions was too extended, but this did not pose any particular risk, since the Volksgrenadier divisions of the Germans were not capable of any offensive action. Moreover, none of the American generals believed in the German offensive in the Ardennes at all. At best, an opportunity was allowed to distract

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shchi attacks. After the war, Middleton, when asked why defensive positions were not prepared, answered with the naivety of a baby: "Do you have any idea how many people and forces it would take to dig a trench 48 miles long?"

The German command attached particular importance to the sabotage operation "Greif". Obersturmbannführer Otto Skorzeny was to command the operation. He was also entrusted with the formation of a separate 150th SS brigade from soldiers and officers who speak English. They were supposed to be dressed up in American uniforms, armed with captured weapons and put on American armored personnel carriers. The brigade was supposed to enter the gap in the zone of the 6th Panzer Army, overtake it and, without engaging in battles with the Americans, reach the bridges across the Meuse between Liege and Namur. Having captured the bridges, the brigade had to hold them until approach of the main forces.

On the morning of December 16, just before the offensive, Rundstedt's order was read out to the troops: "Soldiers of the Western Front, your great hour has struck! You yourself feel everything: everything is at stake! Do your duty, give all your strength and do the superhuman in the name of our fatherland and our Führer!" Such crackling orders, as a rule, are issued by commanders who find themselves in a desperate situation and no longer believe in success. And yet, in the sector of the offensive, the Germans managed to create superiority in forces, although this was not too difficult, given the frank weakness of Middleton's corps. They had 2.5 times more tanks and soldiers and 4 times more artillery. The latter was important, since the offensive began in bad weather, which interfered with air operations. One of Jodl's conditions turned out to be fulfilled! However, the blizzard interfered not only with the Americans, but also with the Germans.

At dawn, the German artillery opened furious fire on the American positions, after which specially formed infantry assault battalions went on the attack. And once again the old thing came true: "Any plan exists only until the first shot." The offensive on the right flank of the 1st SS Panzer Corps stalled,

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because it was at this moment that the 2nd Infantry Division moved into the positions of the American 99th Infantry Division to relieve it, and as a result, the 12th and 277th Volks Grenadier Divisions were stuck almost in their original positions. Only on the left flank did the paratroopers successfully move forward, encountering practically no resistance. A process began that was fatal for the blitzkrieg—the narrowing of the front of the offensive, but it still needed to be able to take advantage of it. However, advancing problems arise quite automatically, as the Germans were convinced very soon.

The commander of the 6th Panzer Army, Oberst Gruppenführer Dietrich, decided to throw his panzer divisions into battle already on the first day of the offensive, since the pace of the offensive was too slow. However, the 12th SS Panzer Division was also stuck, as it had to wait for the restoration of the viaduct blown up by the Americans. 1st SS Panzer Division "Leibstandarte" entered the gap in the band of the 3rd Parachute Division and rushed to the Meuse. But as a result, the offensive was carried out with the small intestine, which the Americans could cut at any moment. The 5th Panzer Army also achieved success not on the entire offensive front, but only in certain sectors. The 116th, 2nd and Training Panzer Divisions were moving forward successfully, while the Volks Grenadiers lagged behind noticeably, which did not particularly surprise anyone. The commander of the 7th Army, General Brandenberger, skillfully took advantage of the success of von Manteuffel's divisions, and his 5th paratrooper division, crushing the American barriers, moved on a par with the Training Panzer Division. However, in general, the German offensive from the very first day did not develop as Dietrich and von Manteuffel wanted. The breakthrough turned out to be noticeably narrower than planned, the Germans also failed to build a single offensive front. It had some strange wavy outlines.

The American command learned about the beginning of the German offensive only a few hours later. At a hastily convened meeting, Eisenhower decided to send two panzer divisions to the Breakthrough Sector, one each from the north and south. By

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the order of their use was to be determined by the commander of the 12th Army Group, General Bradley. This indicates; that the American generals still did not believe in the seriousness of what was happening. They convinced themselves that the Germans were incapable of a major offensive, and even less so in the Ardennes, and acted accordingly.

In parallel, the operation "Greif" was developed, which was carried out by Skorzeny's saboteurs. Although his battalion never managed to reach the bridges over the Meuse, he made quite a stir in the American rear. General Patton reported to Eisenhower on December 17: "The Fritz, who speak excellent English, made a rustle, cut wires, removed road signs, deceived entire divisions and created the impression of wedging into our defenses." The Americans had to hurry to restore order in their own rear. By the way, this was probably almost the only case when the Germans actually used sabotage formations. In any case, during the operation "Barbarossa" the constantly sounded cry "Saboteurs!" had no basis. |

The Americans had to urgently create a whole network of checkpoints, the military police interrogated everyone and everything, regardless of shoulder straps. Questions were asked that only a real American could answer, such as the name of Mickey Mouse's girlfriend. True, General Bradley almost got caught when he correctly named the capital of the state of Illinois. The policeman did not learn his native geography well, and this created problems for the commander of the army group. By the way, in addition to the Germans, the Americans also captured a large number of the British, who had no idea about American realities.

In the end, most of the saboteurs were destroyed. The Americans who were caught were shot without much doubt, since the Germans wore someone else's uniform. Skorzeny assumed this, but did not share his thoughts with ordinary participants in the operation, however, both he and his entourage wore German under American uniforms in case of being captured.

As we have already said, the blizzards prevented the Allied aviation, but they also disrupted the landing of the German paratroopers - the operation "Stosser". The landing did not take place until December 17 at 0300, 11 kilometers north of the important stronghold of Malmedy. They were supposed to block the road through Malmedy and prevent the transfer of American reinforcements from the north. But the paratroopers were scattered over a large area and did not fulfill their task. The only thing that the commander of the detachment, Lieutenant Colonel von der Heidte, managed to do was to gather some of his soldiers and hand them over in an organized manner on December 20th. In general, all sabotage operations in the American rear ended in failure for the Germans.

On December 17, the German offensive continued, and literally in the morning of that day, the Americans had to make sure from their own experience that the atrocities of the SS men were not an invention of Soviet propaganda. Not far from Malmedy, the tankers of the Peiper battle group from the 1st SS Panzer Division defeated the 256th observation artillery battalion in a short-lived battle, taking a large number of. number of prisoners. Obersturmbannführer Peiper had already become famous for his atrocities on the Eastern Front and, once on the Western Front, did not change his habits. Several dozen Americans were shot. After the war, they tried to try Peiper and even sentenced him to life imprisonment for this episode. The fact that he destroyed entire villages along with the inhabitants in the Soviet Union did not interest the American judges. However, they were not interested in the mass executions of the Belgians either. The "life" sentence lasted only 11 years. Peiper eventually moved to France, where he was killed in 1976 by unknown assailants. It is assumed that they were former resistance fighters, although personally I would like to think that this was a successful KGB operation.

But we digress a little. On December 17, Peiper's tanks continued to advance, although not as fast as expected. Peiper himself said that the road along which they move

gales, suitable for motorcycles, but not for tanks. As a result, by the evening he stopped his column, stretched along a narrow road, without turning north. Here Peiper made a blunder by not capturing Malmedy. In this case, he could break through to the headquarters of the 1st Army or go to Liege - the largest supply base of the Allies. However, he chose to scrupulously carry out the order and moved west to the Meuse. Nevertheless, a quiet panic began in the American headquarters. Omar Bradley writes:

"During the battle of the Bulge, the headquarters of the 1st Army was forced to hastily evacuate from Spa, and, as if wanting to reward themselves for the humiliation they had endured, the officers of this headquarters, after the battles, began to rummage through the reports and pick up quotes "proving" that | The army foresaw the danger of a German offensive, but its warnings were not taken into account at the higher headquarters, that is, at the headquarters of the army group. Such statements by the First Army are pure nonsense, since von Rundstedt managed to mislead the command of this army as skillfully as he did the rest of the Allied command. I take full responsibility for the "reasonable risk" we took in the Ardennes, but I reject the charge that I did not heed any warning signs.

_ December 11th I visited Courtney Hodges at the Spa. Some officers of the 1st Army headquarters like to say that they warned in time about the imminent danger, but the army group headquarters, due to its carelessness, allegedly did not want to listen to their words. If these officers really warned, then it must be said that they failed to convince with their arguments not only the headquarters of the army group, but even their army commander. Hodges was as misled as we were by Rundstedt's demonstrative preparations for a counter-offensive in the Ruhr area.

It must be said that the terrain in the area chosen by the Germans for the offensive was very specific. The wooded mountain range did not allow the deployment of tank forces on a wide front and forced them to advance only along the roads.

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In this regard, key forks such as Malmedy, Saint-Vith, Houffalize and Bastogne acquired particular importance. It was the problems with the capture of these points that predetermined the final failure of the German offensive. On December 17, the Germans could freely capture Malmedy and Saint-Vith, which no one defended, but Peiper, acting strictly according to the plan, passed Malmedy, and for unknown reasons, the Germans did not pay attention to Saint-Vith. As a result, the Germans had to deliver supplies to 2 Panzer and 2 Infantry divisions of the 6th Panzer Army along a single road, since all the others passed through Saint-Vit. It seems that Dietrich and von Manteuffel focused their attention on the areas where the offensive developed more successfully - north and south of the city. The 18th and 62nd Volks Grenadier Divisions approached him so slowly that the Americans had time to prepare. And if the German tanks drove a wedge into the front of the American US Army Corps, then Saint-Vitt formed a wedge driven into the front of the German KSUJ tank corps. However, we remember that this corps was the weakest in the 5th Panzer Army and did not have a single panzer division.

As a result, when the Germans reached St. Vith on December 19, the Americans prepared for defense. The city was surrounded by units of the 106th Infantry and 9th Panzer Divisions, and the Americans, to the great surprise of the enemy, were not going to surrender at all. There were such traffic jams on the roads behind German lines that Model and von Manteuffel were forced to abandon their cars and walk on foot in order to be in time for a command meeting. The model rebuked von Manteuffel: "It seems to me that you are behind schedule, especially in the Saint-Vit area." He agreed: "Yes, but I will capture him tomorrow." "I'm waiting for it. And so that you capture it quickly, tomorrow I will hand over to you the Fuhrer's security brigades," Model promised.

_ However, the day of December 20 passed surprisingly calmly in the Saint-Vitus sector. The Germans just don't managed to prepare an attack, as the artillery was stuck far behind. And on the same day, another event took place, which

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but put an end to the blitz operation. Manteuffel's panzer divisions, which had been advancing so far quite successfully south of Saint-Vit, ran into another key point - Bastogne.

Von Manteuffel, who had lost patience, on December 20 ordered Colonel Roemer, the commander of the Fuhrer's guard brigade, to storm St. Vith alone. However, Roemer was more interested in the successful advance to the Meuse and the laurels of the winner of the Americans, he doubted the success of the assault on the stronghold and therefore decided to portray the attack, but nothing more. After American anti-tank guns knocked out 4 lead tanks, Roemer canceled the attack. And on December 21, he generally spat on Saint-Vith and moved on, leaving the assault on the Volks city to the grenadier divisions. Such behavior may seem strange, but one should remember who Colonel Roemer was. It was he, then still a major, who made the main contribution to the suppression of the rebellion on July 20, and therefore he enjoyed the full confidence and goodwill of the Fuhrer. This allowed him at times to ignore the orders of the generals.

December 21 XM! the tank corps pulled up artillery, and after a short shelling in the evening, the infantry went on the attack. The Americans took up positions on a low ridge east of the city. The artillery preparation was not effective enough, and the return fire of the American artillery inflicted heavy losses on the Germans. And yet they managed to seep through the American lines and start a fight in the depths of the defense. And at dusk, as many as 6 "tigers" appeared, which, firing from a long distance, destroyed all American tanks and began to shell the trenches. The American infantry could not stand it and began to withdraw. Lieutenant Colonel Fuller, who commanded the detachment, simply ran away, leaving his soldiers behind.

General Clarke of the 7th Panzer Division, who commanded the garrison of St. Vith, "coldly led the retreat and managed to establish a new line of defense 1,000 yards behind the city." At least that's what American historians say. True, they don't say a word about fights

for myself

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Saint Vith. But they are happy to report that the Germans who broke into the city from several sides were engaged in robbing property abandoned by the Americans. In general, another traffic jam arose in Saint-Vith, and Model, who rushed there, was again forced to walk. Probably not the most familiar occupation for a field marshal.

As you can see, the history of the defense of Saint-Vith, which the Americans boast from time to time, looks rather doubtful. For unknown reasons, the Germans did not pay attention to this city for a long time, and when they did, the American garrison did not last even one day. And yet, during a critical period, the Germans lost one of the shortest routes to the Meuse.

The second shortest route passed through the city of Bastogne. His fate was decided at a meeting on the evening of December 19 with Eisenhower. Patton, in his own unique way, said, "Fuck it. Let's gather our courage and let those bastards run all the way to Paris. Then we just cut them off and eat them." There were some reasons for such an idea, it allowed the full use of the mobility of American troops, although Paris still should not have been given away. However, Eisenhower and Bradley opted for a more cautious option. The Commander-in-Chief replied sternly to Patton: "In no case will the enemy be allowed to cross the Meuse." Eisenhower decided to firmly hold the edges of the breakthrough, block the important road junctions at Saint-Vith and Bastogne, and establish a line of defense on the Meuse.

On December 19, von Manteuffel's units approached Bastogne, but its garrison had already taken up defensive positions. It should be noted that it was in no way stronger than the garrison of Saint-Vith - the 10th parachute division of General McAuliffe and separate units of the 10th tank division. The only serious difference was the presence in the city of 4 battalions of corps artillery. However, McAuliffe did not have firm confidence in the outcome of the battles and promised the corps commander

Middleton will hold out for two days in the event of a complete encirclement. The general barely had time to return to the city from headquarters

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corps - German tanks cut the road half an hour after his return.

The Germans repeated their mistake by simply encircling Bastogne rather than launching a decisive assault. On December 21 and 22, they probe the defenses, while von Manteuffel's tanks are forced to make their way around the city along forest paths. It seems that the German commander decided to take the city with little bloodshed, because on December 22 he sent truce envoys with a proposal to surrender the city. What happened later was one of the most remarkable episodes in American military history.

When the paper was brought to McAuliffe, he burst out laughing and slammed: "Fuck ...!" Then the general asked his headquarters what the officers thought about this. Someone diplomatically remarked: "Your words will be difficult to translate." As a result, the Americans decided not to translate anything, and the German ultimatum came back with a single word attributed. It is clear that none of the cultured German officers understood the untranslatable play on words of the American vagabonds. Therefore, they asked the American colonel, who transmitted the answer, what does it actually mean. The Colonel readily explained that in literary English that single word meant "Go to hell."

However, it cannot be said that the garrison did not experience any problems, even if the Germans did not seriously storm the city. The fact is that American artillery willingly fired at any target they saw, and as a result, by noon on December 22, they began to experience a shortage of ammunition. McAuliffe ordered to save them in case of an assault. As a result, the Germans calmly drove around literally beyond the outskirts, fearing nothing.

In fact, the fate of Bastogne clearly shows what happens to a blitzkrieg if it lacks one of the components. Near Kursk, the Germans lacked sapper units; here they advanced without air support and also faced many problems. If in motion

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there were dive-bombers, the fate of Bastogne would have been decided as quickly as the fate of, say, Tobruk.

Meanwhile, General Patton's 3rd Army launched a counteroffensive from the south. The 4th Panzer Division was ordered to break through and relieve Bastogne, but it advanced too slowly. As always in such cases, there were thirty-three explanations. Firstly, the tank fleet of the division was too worn out and could not withstand long marches. Many crews were too inexperienced... And so on and so forth. Patton demanded that the division "rush like the devil," but it crawled like a snail.

The defenders of Bastogne began to tire, although the Germans still carried out only trial attacks with small forces. And then the Lord God himself came to the aid of the Americans, otherwise it is impossible to say. On December 23, the weather improved dramatically, which allowed the aircraft of the 9th Air Army to come into play. As we have noted more than once, the Americans did not establish a system of interaction between troops and aviation in the European theater of operations, but the American pilots did their favorite thing - they began to hunt literally for every German vehicle they saw, forcing the enemy to take cover in the forests. This indirect support proved to be quite effective, though mainly due to the large number of sorties. In one day, the 9th Air Army made [300 sorties. But the assistance of transport aviation turned out to be more significant. American air bridges worked much more reliably than Goering's, and the Bastogne garrison received 95% of the dropped supplies. However, on December 24, the Germans prepared better, deploying a large number of anti-aircraft guns around the city, and shot down quite a few transport aircraft.

On December 25, the Germans finally decided on a general assault on the city. It was supposed to be led by the fresh 25th Panzer Grenadier Division, but only 2 motorized infantry battalions, 2 self-propelled artillery battalions and 18 tanks managed to arrive in time. This detachment was immediately thrown into

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assault, without reconnaissance and preparation, because Model demanded the immediate capture of Bastogne. He was supposed to be assisted by the infantry of the 26th Volks Grenadier Division. Once again, the Germans were forced to plan their actions so as not to fall under the attack of American aircraft, so the assault was scheduled for the morning. The city was supposed to fall by 9.00. But the assault was repulsed, and the orders of the corps headquarters only led to unnecessary losses. And in the late afternoon of the same day, the tanks of the 4th division finally reached Bastogne. As a curious historical fact, we point out that this was the combat debut of an assault tank ("Sherman" with reinforced frontal armor).

Although the German command had already realized that the operation would not end with success, it continued the offensive. Instead of a normal breakthrough of the front, two small intestines turned out - in the north in the zone of the 1st SS Panzer Division, in the south - in the zone of the 2nd SS Panzer Division. The American artillery shot through them. Nothing good was promised by this development. It seems that Model decided to play it safe, and already on December 18 he told Rundstedt and Jodl by phone that the plan had failed. On December 24, Model again suggested returning to one of the original options - to use the breakthrough of the 2nd Panzer Division to encircle and destroy American units on the front near the Meuse. Rundstedt looked at things even more gloomily. On December 25, he proposed to stop the offensive altogether, since even the "small option" proposed by von Manteuffel became impossible. However, Hitler stubbornly demanded to attack

further.

Starting from 2] December, the Germans basically tried to level the front. And if they managed to liquidate the "pocket" at Saint Vitus, then the "boil" in Bastogne was preserved until the very end of the operation. The 5th Panzer Army was heartbroken, but still moved on. Despite the growing opposition from Allied aviation, on December 23, the 2nd Panzer Division approached a distance of 27 kilometers to the town of Dinant, where it was met by an American Panzer Division.

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her with the same number. After three days of stubborn fighting, the division lost about 80 tanks and was stopped. At least that's what the Americans say. The second is impossible. soar, the first is impossible to verify. The 6th Panzer Army acted extremely unsuccessfully. She failed to advance in the direction of Liège, failed to adequately cover the flank of the 5th Panzer. Dietrich spent all the reserves received on strengthening the northern front of the ledge.

And on the other side of the front line, another squabble between the British and Americans was brewing. On December 20, Eisenhower made a completely reasonable decision from a military point of view: to divide the dangerous section into two - northern and southern. The American 1st Army, which found itself on the northern face of the salient, was subordinated to Montgomery. Such a decision was a serious mistake of the general, who was far from politics, although Bradley immediately warned him that this would lead to a fall in the authority of the Americans. Montgomery did his best not to participate in the battle, but at the same time to look like a true Savior. He deployed his XXX Corps on the Meuse line with the sole purpose of covering the flank and rear of the 21st Army Group, blocking the bridges at Givet, Dinant and Namur. The same | th army had to take the rap. Convincing evidence of how the British fought in the Ardennes is the figure of their losses - 200 men.

lovek.

When Model realized that the 6th Panzer Army had been stopped, he decided to pin all his hopes on von Manteuffel's army, instructing Dietrich to cover its flank. However, at the same time, the reserve II SS Panzer Corps nevertheless transferred it to Dietrich, since the main forces of the 6th Panzer Army were tied up in battles. This corps was supposed to capture another road junction at Verbomont, which was covered by the American 82nd Airborne Division.

At dawn on December 23, after a severe night snowstorm, the SS tried to break through her positions, but were repulsed. However, in the late afternoon, the 2nd SS Panzer Division "Das Reich" pulled up and, after a 20-minute artillery preparation, threw

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la American paratroopers. However, the next morning the weather improved and the American fighter-bombers began to hunt for the German tanks. This made the Germans forget about the offensive. The German offensive finally fizzled out.

Summary. The offensive in the Ardennes was the last desperate attempt by the Wehrmacht to defeat the allies on the Western Front. It was conceived in the style of a classic blitzkrieg — a swift tank attack with encirclement and destruction of large enemy forces. However, in its course, even more clearly than during Operation Luttich, the inability of the German army to take offensive actions was manifested. First of all, the Germans failed to muster sufficient forces. For example, the Training Tank Division had only 57 tanks at the start of the offensive. Allied air superiority forced the Germans to take advantage of bad weather, which ruled out air intervention, but such a decision deprived their own troops of air support, which could lead to fatal consequences, as during the battles for Bastogne. The choice of the offensive area also turned out to be erroneous. Yes, the Germans found the weak point of the Allied front and proved once again that tanks can pass through the Ardennes even in winter. But "to pass" does not mean "to fight successfully". Even the 2nd Panzer Division, which advanced more successfully than all the others, covered no more than 10 kilometers per day, which is not enough for a blitzkrieg. In short, Operation Wacht am Rhein was an attempt with unsuitable means, and all the successes of the Germans are due only to the carelessness of the Americans.

Chapter 16 THE AUGUST STORM

will be absolutely right. Indeed, there is one book under this title, dedicated to the August battles of 1945.

in Manchuria. Another strange thing. Have you noticed that somehow gradually the leading historian of the Great Patriotic War in Russia became David Glantz? Doesn't this seem surprising to you? That's when Paul Carell's books come out - it's understandable, after all, the injured party, a very interested person. But what about Glantz? Colonel in the American Army, lecturer at the Staff College at Leavenworth, what does he have to do with this war? And what is our entire monumental Institute of Military History, full of academicians, professors and doctors of sciences, busy with, like a portrait of Franz Josef with flies? Personally, it seems to me that studying the history of the Great Patriotic War on the basis of American retellings is at least embarrassing.

By August 1945, there was a distinct smell of gunpowder on the Far Eastern borders of the Soviet Union. The Soviet Union assumed the obligation to start a war against Japan. after the end of hostilities in Europe and intended to fulfill their obligations. A few words should be said here about the mythical threat of Japanese aggression that allegedly existed in 1941.

Imagine that Japan attacked the USSR. As a result, it could get only one more difficult, protracted war with uncertain (this is in the best case!) Prospects, but at the same time it did not come close to solving the raw material problem. On the contrary, the expenditure of strategic reserves would proceed at an accelerated pace, given the scale of such a war. Even in the case of capturing some territories (suppose it's a pity or something), Japan did not acquire a drop of oil, not a gram of tin, lead, zinc, or rubber. None of this was observed in the Siberian and Yakut taiga. Even a madman will not talk about the development of Norilsk by the Japanese. That is, Japanese aggression against the Soviet Union would be simply meaningless. In the most successful scenario, if we allow a simple occupation by Japan of Primorye and the Far East, Japan would acquire only problems, but no benefits. The Japanese remembered the lessons of the intervention of the 1920s. Crackling statements of some

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Neralov remained empty concussion of the air. All this is confirmed by the events that took place after 22 June.

On June 25 [94] a joint meeting of the government and the Imperial Headquarters was held in Tokyo. Foreign Minister Matsuoka demanded the start of hostilities and found himself all alone. The ministers of war and navy came out in unison against him, and Prime Minister Konoe spoke out in the sense that there was a possibility of terminating the Tripartite Pact. On June 27, at a new meeting, Matsuoka again demands the start of a war against the USSR, this time the Chiefs of the General Staff of the Army and Navy jointly oppose him. Even the command of the Kwantung Army was against it. The attack should have been undertaken under the most favorable conditions, and for this there was a period of time less than a month: from August 15 to [September 9. Previously, the Japanese could not concentrate superior forces, and later the autumn rains began, which prevented any major offensive. The issue was finally closed.

But the Soviet Union in August 1945 was much more determined. Western historians are surprised at the modesty of Stalin's claims: the return of the southern part of Sakhalin and the Kuril Islands. Here you can really be surprised. But remember, who got the most as a result of the defeat of Germany? Poland. But pro-Moscow regimes were established in the countries of Eastern Europe, so perhaps Stalin was counting on a similar scenario here too: limiting himself to modest territorial acquisitions, sharply increasing the sphere of his political influence? And in addition: how do you imagine the consequences of the occupation of Hokkaido?

The outcome of the battles in Manchuria was predetermined, it is enough just to compare the forces of the opposing factions. After the transfer of additional forces to the Far East, the Soviet Union had more than 1.6 million soldiers, more than 26,000 guns, 5,500 tanks and 3,900 aircraft there. Although the total number of enemy troops reached | million

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people who were armed with 6,600 guns, about 1,000 tanks and 1,800 aircraft, there were about 450,000 Japanese soldiers in Manchuria proper. The combat readiness of the troops of the "independent empire of Manchukuo" was such that it made no sense to take them into account. However, like the "army" of the MPR.

The difference in the quality of weapons worsened the position of the Japanese even more. The Japanese army experienced an acute shortage of heavy artillery. Anti-tank guns were available in negligible quantities, in addition, these 37-mm "stumps" were simply useless in the fight against new Soviet tanks. The infantry did not have machine guns, and the situation with machine guns was not the best. The level of combat training was also incomparable. The Soviet soldiers had four years of heavy fighting against a stubborn and skillful enemy, and by 1945 the Kwantung Army was a pitiful sight. In the last two years of the war, the most capable divisions were sent to the Philippines and China, replaced by older, untrained reservists, who made up half of the total. The army experienced an acute shortage of gasoline. The simplest proof of this is the almost complete absence of references to the actions of Japanese aviation. Yes, there were some separate kamikaze attacks, but two thousand planes seemed to evaporate. Japanese tanks were also not seen in battles. In a word, there is nothing surprising in the swift defeat of the Japanese troops in Manchuria.

In April 1945, the Soviet Union denounced the neutrality treaty and on August 8 declared war on Japan. It is surprising the position of some Russian historians who are trying to accuse Stalin of treachery or deceit. They used, they say, the time difference, and the Japanese ambassador did not even have time to warn his government. On December 7, 1941, the Japanese tried to do the same, but due to technical problems and the stupidity of the ambassador in Washington, they presented their note after the attack on Pearl Harbor. And here the war was declared by the very law

in a different way. And before the start of hostilities. The Japanese were paid with their own coin, but honestly.

The idea of the Manchurian strategic offensive operation was very elegant. If everything went as planned by the command, the main role in the offensive would have been played by the 6th Guards Tank Army of General Kravchenko. It was included in the Trans-Baikal Front, deployed on the very Tamtsak-Bulak ledge, because of which there were battles at Khalkhin Gol. One should not accuse the author of inconsistency, since in the chapter devoted to these events, he wrote about the complete worthlessness of this area: In 1939, no one really needed it. And even now it was very difficult to concentrate an entire tank army in the desert scorched by the sun, especially since, in addition to personnel and equipment, literally all types of supplies, including water, had to be brought there. But as a result, a powerful tank group struck from a completely unexpected direction, reaching the rear of the Japanese fortified areas built along the Soviet-Chinese border. Such a blow undermined the entire Japanese defense system in Manchuria. Here is how Marshal Vasilevsky, the author of the plan, wrote about it:

- "The plan of the campaign in the Far East, developed by us at the General Staff, was approved by the Headquarters, and then approved by the Central Committee of the Party and the State Defense Committee. The plan provided for delivering the main blow from Transbaikalia - the territory of the Mongolian People's Republic - in the direction of Changchun (Xinjiang) and Shenyang (Mukden). Its goal is to withdraw the main grouping of Soviet troops around the Hailar and Khalun-Arshan fortified regions from the south and cut the 3rd Front of the Kwantung Army into two parts. True, on the path of the offensive of the Soviet troops of this group until they reached the Central regions of Northeast China, there was a waterless desert steppe, as well as the hard-to-reach mountain range of Greater Khingan.

A counter strong blow was envisaged from the side

Primorye, from the area south of Lake Khanka, in the direction of Jilin (Girin) by the troops of the 1st Far Eastern Front. After joining here, the troops of this and the Trans-Baikal Fronts were to develop an offensive in the direction of Mukden, Port Arthur. They were to break through the Japanese fortified areas; for this they had to have all the necessary forces and means. These directions ensured the complete encirclement of the main forces of the Kwantung Army in the shortest possible time.

At the same time, the plan provided that the forces of the same two main groupings of Soviet troops would deliver two auxiliary strikes each. The group deployed in the Amur region was supposed to advance in a number of directions from the north in order to pin down the enemy opposing it and thereby contribute to the success of delivering strikes on the main directions. |

Now take a closer look, does this plan remind you of anything? Entry by the right flank to the rear of the enemy armies occupying a fortified area. After all, this is the Schlieffen plan! Only, unlike the German version, the plan prepared by Marshal Vasilevsky worked perfectly. It turned out to be a blitzkrieg in its original purity - the enemy did not even manage to properly prepare for defense. By the way, a small remark in passing. According to the maps cited by David Glantz in his book, the Khalkhin Gol River flows through Chinese territory ...

However, for all its beauty, this plan raises certain doubts. Apparently, the Soviet command deceived itself. It took seriously the tales told by the Japanese about the impenetrable zone of fortifications on the border, about the formidable and invincible Kwantung Army, and decided to fight the Japanese for real. The Japanese had a bad idea, with

what kind of enemy they have to fight, but Soviet intelligence was also not up to par. Actually, there is a suspicion that our command did not have any information at all about Manchuria, the Japanese troops stationed there, until

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rye network and so on. Probably, it was not worth starting cunning detours and advancing through the ridges of the Greater Khingan. One could simply strike along the South Manchuria railway, as was the case in the Russo-Japanese War, and everything would have ended just as quickly. The Japanese had nothing to stop the tank army. But what was done was done.

Transbaikalian Front Marshal R. Ya. Malinovsky launched an offensive on August 9 at 00.10, 10 minutes after the official declaration of war. No artillery preparation was carried out as it was completely unnecessary. The maximum that our troops could meet in this area was the horse patrols of the Barguts. The cavalry-mechanized group of General Pliev, advancing on the extreme right flank of the front, covered about 90 kilometers in a day. The 17th army of General Danilov also did not meet the enemy, and its vanguards traveled about 70 kilometers. The front's main striking force, the 6th Guards Tank Force, advanced in two corps columns. She passed more than her neighbors and covered 150 kilometers in a day, reaching the foot of the Greater Khingan - her main enemy, much more serious than all the Japanese divisions put together. To supply the army, 2 divisions of transport aviation were involved. Only the 39th army of General Lyudnikov, advancing on the left flank in the area of old battles, met some resistance from the Japanese 107th division, which occupied the Khalun-Arshan fortified area. However, the vanguards of the army bypassed it, covering about 60 kilometers in a day, which immediately made resistance on the border pointless.

The 36th army of General Luchinsky, who was advancing even further to the left, also had to fight. Luchinsky immediately threw the 206th tank brigade against the city of Hailar, which was the center of the fortified area of the same name. Here, as elsewhere, the Japanese were taken by surprise. By the evening of August 9, the tankers captured the key bridges to the north of the city. Japanese troops managed to delay our

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tanks, but the 119th Infantry Division, which formed the basis of the garrison of the fortified area, began to retreat to the east. In order not to slow down the offensive, General Luchinsky sent a tank brigade and the 2nd Rifle Corps around the city. As you can see, now all our generals understood that the key to the success of the operation was a high rate of advance. Hailar was occupied on August 11 by the 94th rifle division from the second echelon of the army. And on August 12, the organized retreat of the Japanese units turned into a stampede.

This offensive immediately crumpled all the plans of the commander of the Kwantung Army, General Yamada. The Japanese rear units began to retreat in panic towards Changchun and Qiqihar. Already on the evening of August 9, Yamada decided to try to organize a defense in the Mudan area, in fact, leaving all of Manchuria to the mercy of fate. Almost all the troops were either cut off in the north, or had to abandon their positions and hastily retreat to the south.

On August 10, General Kravchenko's tanks began forcing the Greater Khingan ranges. If the Japanese generals had guessed to set up at least some patrols on the passes, his task would have become incredibly difficult. However, until now, Kravchenko has not met a single Japanese. The speed of advance of the tank army turned out to be higher than planned. In 3 days, she traveled about 350 kilometers through extremely difficult terrain. The only limitation was constant supply problems. We also note the skillful actions of General Lyudnikov, who did not tie his main forces to the destruction of the 107th division, but moved them further. As a result, the Japanese themselves abandoned their fortifications and began to retreat.

Only on August 13 did the 6th Guards Tank Army meet some kind of resistance on the approaches to Tongliao and Taonan. They were just scattered groups and individual suicide bombers who threw themselves under the tanks. However, if you look at the map, you will immediately understand that all this no longer made any sense. Our troops were deep in the rear of the Kwantung Army.

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On August 15, the troops of the front finally encountered enemy resistance. But the funny thing is, it was not the Japanese troops, but the Bargut cavalry, which tried to stop the advance of Pliev's mechanized cavalry group. But the 27th motorized rifle brigade dispersed 3 cavalry divisions. On August 18, the Japanese command ordered the surrender of the Kwantung Army, but the Barguts continued to pretend resistance until August 21. The only reason for this can be considered only the disruption of communication and the general chaos that ensued as a result of the rapid advance of our troops, and by no means any special fanaticism and stubbornness.

The second main blow towards the 6th Guards Tank Army was inflicted by the troops of the 1st Far Eastern Front of Marshal K.A. Meretskov, forming giant pincers, in which the entire Kwantung Army would be. However, here the situation was completely different than in the offensive zone of the Trans-Baikal Front. The eastern regions of Manchuria were fortified much stronger than Western ones.

But the Japanese, who built these fortifications for about 10 years, seem to have judged the capabilities of the Red Army by their own. Of course, infantry, supported by 75-mm guns and a handful of tin tanks, would not have broken through these positions. But these positions could not withstand the blow of heavy tanks, supported by numerous heavy artillery and rocket launchers. By the evening of August 9, three corps of the 5th Army broke through the front for 35 kilometers, their advance into the depths of Manchurian territory ranged from 16 to 25 kilometers. If we recall the descriptions of Panzerwaffe operations, these were the criteria of the blitzkrieg. At the same time, the strike force did not stop to liquidate the surviving strongholds in Suifenghe, Dongqing, Mulin. The rifle corps of the second echelon engaged in this, and the resistance of the Japanese did not last long.

On August 10, the troops of the 5th Army continued their rapid advance to the west and south, going to the rear border uk

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fortified areas. During that day, Soviet troops marched up to 30 kilometers, and the width of the breakthrough increased to 75 kilometers. The Japanese defense collapsed on the eastern border as well. Actually, it is precisely this ease with which our troops broke through the Japanese positions that casts doubt on the wisdom of the overall strategic plan. Maybe you shouldn't have planted a garden?

1] August, the vanguards of the 65th and 72nd rifle divisions reached the Mulin River. The operation plan provided that this milestone would be reached only on the eighth day of the operation. Therefore, it is not at all surprising that our commanders were seized with a victory fever - a feeling that they rarely managed to experience. Marshal Meretskov ordered to further accelerate the pace of the offensive and take the city of Mudanjiang the next day, although according to the original plan, the Soviet troops were supposed to take it only on the seventeenth day. To fulfill the order, the commander of the 5th Army, General N.I. Krylov formed a separate detachment from a tank brigade, a regiment of self-propelled guns and two rifle battalions and threw it on Mudanjiang. Our commanders, intoxicated with success, decided that the resistance of the Japanese was over, and moved in marching columns without any protection. at

Some of our historians say that on the morning of August 12, Japanese troops launched a strong counterattack on the approaches to Mudanjiang. In fact, it was an almost symbolic counterattack launched by the Sasaki Detachment (two infantry battalions of the 135th Division) attached to the 124th Division defending the city. But if the enemy has finally lost his prudence and does not expect any surprises, even 2 battalions can inflict serious losses. However, the Japanese only managed to slow down the offensive of Krylov's army a little, the Japanese could not stop it in principle. However, Meretskov himself talks about this as a dramatic episode: |

"The main grouping of Japanese troops fought near Mudanizyan. Here the enemy lost about 40 thousand soldiers. Semi

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Having received the news that the Red Banner soldiers had broken through the enemy defenses in the Mudanjiang area, I went to see and this is what I saw. At first, for about five kilometers, the forefield stretched, prepared to hold back our vanguards. A relatively small interval, and we ran into the main defensive zone with long-term reinforced concrete points. I began to determine the depth of this strip and in the place where I was, I counted four kilometers. We drove on exactly fifteen kilometers, and before us opened a new line of defense three kilometers deep. We drove another fifteen kilometers and found another defensive zone of the same depth. The knots of resistance looked extremely impressive. When examining one of them, we counted 17 artillery pillboxes, > artillery and machine gun points, more than 50 machine gun nests and a lot of various structures

field type.

But even the SVU, which is distinguished, let's say, by a peculiar reflection of events, dryly notes: "On August 13, the 26th rifle corps, having bypassed Mudanjiang from the northeast, broke into the city. This allowed the front commander to turn the main forces of the 5th Army around the city in order to maintain a high rate of advance to quickly advance to Kirin. That is, there were fortifications, but there were no battles.

On August 13, after a series of clashes, the disheveled units of the Japanese 124th Division rolled back north into the hills along the highway and held out with surrender until August 22. However, this no longer worried anyone, since they did not interfere with the Soviet offensive.

By this time, the left-flank 25th Army launched an offensive along the coast to the port of Racine. As in many other places, the Japanese system of fortifications proved completely inadequate. The important fortified point and railway junction of Tumyn, on which the defense of the entire coastal flank of the Kwantung Army was held, was captured already by noon on August 10. As in almost the entire front of the offensive, here the main obstacle is advice

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Russian troops had problems with the delivery of fuel. The Japanese were so confused that there was practically no resistance. For example, on August 12, the 393rd Rifle Division on trucks attacked the positions of the 113th fortified area, which was occupied by the Japanese 101st separate regiment. Do you imagine it? On trucks! The Japanese hastily retreated, and the advanced units of the division, with the support of the amphibious assault, occupied the port of Ungi. On August 16, the Pacific Fleet occupied Seishin, definitively depriving the Kwantung Army of direct sea communication with Japan. |

After the fall of Mudanizyan, which was an important communications hub for Northeast Manchuria, the entire Japanese defense system collapsed. Now the Soviet troops could move freely in any direction, while the Japanese lost this opportunity and could only cling to the positions that they occupied by that day. Harbin, Girin, Changchun, Mukden - all the most important settlements of Manchuria - were under threat.

Around August 16, an unusual situation developed in Manchuria. On the one hand, the organized resistance of the Japanese troops was over. On the other hand, individual units and formations continued to fight. A statement appeared in Soviet newspapers that the Imperial Rescript of August 14 was not a formal act of surrender. So it was! Just as the note of the Japanese government dated December 7, 1941 was not an act of declaring war, so now there has not been a statement of surrender and cessation of hostilities. On August 16, a new rescript followed, which spoke of "the intention to start negotiations for peace." In a word, the Japanese tried to capitulate without capitulating.

The Soviet command was faced with the task of taking control of the entire territory of Manchuria as quickly as possible. This was demanded not only by military, but also by political considerations: it was already necessary to think about the post-war structure of the Far East. And on the horizon loomed |

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American ships preparing to land troops in the ports of China and Korea.

Considering all this, Vasilevsky makes an original decision. He refuses to organize, "correct" military operations and orders the formation of separate mobile detachments, which receive orders to rapidly advance to the indicated points, "without fear of a sharp separation from their main forces." The Manchurian blitzkrieg is turning into a super blitzkrieg.

Such detachments (they can rightly be called combat groups) were created in all armies of the Trans-Baikal and 1st Far Eastern Fronts from tank units, rifle subunits mounted on vehicles, and units of self-propelled and anti-tank artillery. In order to seize important military and industrial installations and accept the surrender of their garrisons, airborne assault forces were landed in Mukden, Changchun, Port Arthur, Dalniy, Harbin and Kirin. Following the airborne assaults, advance detachments entered Mukden, Changchun, Port Arthur and Dalny, and then units and formations of the 6th Guards Tank Army. By the way, the inventors of the blitzkrieg did not think of such a solution. Even during Operations Roth and Attila, when the Germans needed maximum speed to advance through French territory, they did not use airborne assaults. And the order "not to be afraid of being separated from your main forces" seemed to the methodical and correct German brains to be uniform sedition, heresy. After all, we remember the titanic efforts that the OKH made to contain Guderian.

Vasilevsky took a risk, but a calculated risk. After all, far from everywhere the Japanese troops unconditionally laid down their arms. The most obvious example of this is the protracted resistance in the Kuril Islands. Although on August 17 the commander of the Kwantung Army, General Yamada, gave the order to begin negotiations with the Soviet command, and to authenticate the imperial

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The emperor's brother, Prince Takeda, arrived at the rescript, separate formations of the Kwantung Army continued to resist until August 26. We are talking about the so-called Dunning fortified area. However, it is this episode that confirms the correctness of the tactics of the Soviet command. Since the area lay away from the direction of the main attack, there were no assaults or attacks, there were no senseless deaths of soldiers. It's just that starting from August 9, the 223rd separate high-capacity artillery brigade set to work, which calmly and methodically destroyed one strong point after another - a total of 82 units. As a result, 900 people - all that was left of the Japanese garrison - surrendered. Now, if our troops near Stalingrad had acted in the same way, this would have made it possible to avoid unnecessary losses and achieve much more serious successes.

There is no need to hurry where there is no such need, but where there is a need to hurry, one must hurry. On August 18, our paratroopers occupied Harbin; on August 19, Changchun, Kirin, and Mukden; on August 21, Dalny; on August 22, Port Arthur; on August 24, Pyongyang. No other army has ever shown such a speed of advance.

The first of the numerous landings that were thrown out during the battles against Japan was personally sent to Harbin by the commander of the 1st Far Eastern Front, Marshal Meretskov. The landing force was headed by Major General Shelakhov, Deputy Chief of Staff of the Front. The advanced group of 120 people was commanded by Lieutenant Colonel Zabelin. In military terms,

the officers were too high in rank for an ordinary operation. From this it is clear what importance was attached to the landing by the Soviet command.

The landing force that landed in Mukden was commanded by the head of the political department of the Trans-Baikal Front, Major General A.D. Pritula. When the landing planes approached the airport, everyone was occupied with one question: will the Japanese open fire or not? So there were "commissars" and commissars. From the planes they saw Japanese anti-aircraft gunners ready to fire, although not a single shot was fired. But even

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after the landing, the position of the paratroopers could not be considered completely reliable. In any case, during negotiations with the commander of the 3rd Front, completely unexpectedly, the commander of the Mukden garrison, Lieutenant General Hongo, suddenly rebelled and refused to obey him. Stubborn managed to convince only a squadron of bombers, held at low level flight over the airfield.

It is with this landing that the almost detective story of the capture of the last emperor of China, and in 1945 the emperor of the state of Manchukuo Pu Yi, is connected.

When the offensive of the Soviet troops began, the emperor quite reasonably decided that it was time to blow his feet. The prospect of falling into the hands of the Russians did not please him at all. The Japanese also agreed with this, and [On August 1, the Japanese envoy Yoshioka suggested that he leave the capital of Manchukuo, the city of Xinjing (Chanchun). The emperor went by train to the Korean border in the town of Dalinizygou, where he stopped on August 13. Why? Nobody and nothing prevented the emperor from going further to Pyongyang, to Seoul, in general, to the very shore of the Sea of Japan. And yet the journey was interrupted.

, On August 17, Yoshioka suggested to the emperor that he choose a few people from the retinue and fly to Japan. The restriction was put in place because the plane was too small to take all the lackeys, concubines, eunuchs and other necessary people. Emperor Pu Yi flies, but for some reason not Japan, but in the exact opposite direction - to Mukden. Again, what prevented even on a small plane, even with intermediate landings, but to fly straight to the east? Absolutely nothing. However, the emperor flew west.

Further more. It is quite clear that it is necessary to hurry, the Soviet troops are rapidly moving across the territory of Manchuria, but the emperor gets stuck for two days in Mukden. And here is a completely natural finale - August 19

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100 Soviet troops landed at the Northern airfield of Mukden, where not only the commander of the Japanese 3rd Front, General Ushiroku Jun, but also Emperor Pu Yi was captured. transferring Pu Yi into the hands of the Soviet authorities? Who, where and when managed to agree on this?

Fortunately, our troops did not have to fully face the peculiarities of the Japanese national character, although in some places they had to take a sip of grief with too stubborn officers. For example, on the Kuril Islands, the fighting ended [September 0. By the way, pay attention to this date — a week after the official signing of the capitulation. But in the tropics, things could turn out differently.

For example, only in March 1974, on the remote Philippine island of Lubang, did 52-year-old Lieutenant Hiroo Onoda emerge from the jungle and surrender to local authorities. Six months earlier, Onoda and his comrade Kinshiki Kozuka had ambushed a Filipino patrol, mistaking it for an American. Kozuka died, and attempts to track down Onoda did not lead to anything: he hid in impenetrable thickets.

To convince Onoda that the war was over, he even had to call his former commander - he did not trust anyone else. Onoda asked permission to keep the sacred samurai sword, which he buried on the island in 1945, as a keepsake.

Onoda was so stunned to find himself in a completely different time that he had to undergo a long psychotherapeutic treatment. He said: "I know that many more of my comrades are hiding in the forests, I know their call signs and the places where they hide. But they will never come to my call. They will think that I did not stand the test and broke down, surrendering to the enemies. Unfortunately, they will die there."

In Japan, Onoda had a touching meeting with his elderly parents. His father said: "I'm proud of that

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the battle! You acted like a real warrior, as your heart told you." |

Brrr ... Imagine something like this on our territory.

The ratio of losses in this operation still remains unclear. Only one thing is clear: given its transience, the number of those killed cannot be too large. Therefore, it is difficult to believe the old Soviet sources that claim that the Kwantung Army lost more than 87,000 people killed. Too much for four or five days of real fighting. Probably closer to the truth are the Japanese sources who speak of 20,000 killed. With the number of captured Japanese, the picture does turn out to be ridiculous. According to Soviet data, about 640,000 soldiers were taken prisoner, including the Manchus and soldiers of Prince Dewan. The Japanese managed to count as many as two million prisoners, which looks like complete fantasy - this is with the size of the Kwantung Army not exceeding one million people with all the auxiliary and

allied units.

The losses of the Red Army in this operation, according to various sources, are at the level of 8-9 thousand people killed and about 20 thousand wounded. The statements of the Japanese that we have lost more than 20 thousand people killed, how to put it more delicately, are not dictated by a sober mind.

The Manchurian strategic offensive operation ended with a lightning-fast defeat of the Japanese Kwantung Army. The real resistance of the Japanese lasted less than a week, that is, the operation one hundred percent meets the definition of a blitzkrieg. The Soviet command managed to end the long and bloody war, which lasted for 6 years, with one short, crushing blow. Of course, one could confine oneself to a brief summary, as we have done in previous chapters, but from my point of view, this offensive, for a number of reasons, deserves more detailed consideration.

The fact is that too much distinguishes this operation from the usual European blitzkrieg. The first is time

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In the course of the operation, the offensive was carried out along a front with a total length of about 4,400 kilometers, to a depth of up to 900 kilometers. At the same time, one should take into account the exceptionally complex nature of the terrain along which the Soviet troops had to advance. Numerous mountain ranges, rivers, impenetrable taiga divided this front into several independent sections. You will not be able to find anything like this in Europe, and the highest skill was required from the command in order to coordinate the actions of troops at all levels - from fronts to battalions. The Soviet generals and officers coped with this almost perfectly, some minor inconsistencies can be ignored. As we have already noted, the Germans failed to establish such coordination at the strategic level in 1941, which largely predetermined the failure of Operation Barbarossa. At the same time, the front in European Russia, despite its "anti-tank" roads, had a much higher connectivity than the Manchurian theater of operations.

As noted above, our troops had to operate in a variety of conditions. Therefore, to maintain a high rate of advance, a very careful selection of forces and means of support was required, and in each specific case they were different. The cavalry-mechanized group of General Pliev crossed the Gobi Desert, the 6th Guards Tank Army crossed the mountains of the Greater Khingan, the 1st Red Banner Army was forced to push through the Amur taiga. You understand that the requirements for engineering and logistic support were completely different. Some divisions received additional pontoon-bridge units to quickly cross water barriers. Some are additional convoys. The 6th Guards Tank Division received additional aviation forces to conduct reconnaissance and provide communications between corps columns. Unfortunately, relying on radio communication even in 1945 was risky.

Another feature of the Manchurian operation was

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the fact that the Soviet command managed to achieve complete strategic and tactical surprise. The security measures taken were a curious mixture of sophisticated subterfuges and rather dubious decisions. Among the latter, I would include the already traditional renaming of senior military leaders, because it is not difficult to count Soviet marshals on the fingers. Another thing is that Japanese intelligence failed to reveal the fact of the concentration of huge forces on the borders of Manchuria. It is another matter that here the Soviet command was able to find non-standard solutions. For example, the 6th Guards Tank Army began its offensive directly from the march from the deep rear, without stopping in the area of concentration. The 2nd Red Banner Army did the same.

The suddenness could hardly have been more complete. Intelligence of the Kwantung Army claimed that the Red Army would not be able to launch offensives before the middle of autumn or even spring of 1946. And all the actions of the Japanese command speak of this. The headquarters of the 5th Army convened a meeting of commanders of units and formations, decapitating them on the decisive day. The commander of the Kwantung Army himself was absent from headquarters, on his way to Dairen.

The Soviet command chose completely unexpected places for strikes. None of the Japanese generals was able to foresee a breakthrough through the Greater Khingan and the Gobi. There were not even plans to repel an offensive in these areas. This also happens very rarely, usually headquarters are preparing for any scenario, but not in this case. The degree of ignorance of the Japanese generals is best characterized by the fact that the 1st Panzer Division, formed in Manchuria and stationed there for almost the entire war, was transferred to Japan in 1945. Only the 1st and 9th separate tank brigades remained in Manchuria as part of the Third Army Region. This, by the way, casts very serious doubts on the information about 1,000 tanks that the Kwantung Army had. In addition, the Japanese lost the most effective weapon against any

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steps - a counterattack by a mobile reserve from the depths of defense.

In general, the Japanese were completely unable to resist a modern army with experience in combat operations on a wide front. The Soviet command used battle groups, the core of which was tank units, instead of driving waves of infantry against the Japanese fortifications, and the Japanese demonstrated frank helplessness in the fight against them. The Kwantung Army was stuck somewhere in 1935, although 1945 was already in the yard.

The Soviet command applied another tactical novelty. Instead of reconnaissance groups, strong vanguards moved forward, capable of crushing the resistance of the rear units. These vanguards operated at a great distance from the main forces, sometimes up to 50 kilometers, and enjoyed complete freedom of action. Airborne assault forces were thrown into the Japanese rear for an even greater distance.

In general, the Manchurian offensive operation demonstrates the further development of blitzkrieg tactics, taking into account the increased capabilities of the troops and their improved technical equipment. The principal novelty was the participation in the operation of airborne assault forces. This allows us to call the offensive in Manchuria a forerunner of combined operations, which are typical for modern armies. So, in some respects, our generals were far ahead of their time, it's only a pity that the limited technical capabilities of the Red Army did not allow the FULL implementation of the innovative ideas of the command. But even without that, the rate of advance of the 6th Guards Tank Army amounted to 82 kilometers per day. Even the 36th Army of the Trans-Baikal Front, which had to fight in the Hailar fortified area, covered up to 45 kilometers per day. The speed of the advance of the armies of the 1st Far Eastern Front was somewhat lower, but here it did not drop either.

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fell below 25 kilometers a day, which the Germans considered an excellent achievement.

On September 2, 1945, the surrender of Imperial Japan was signed, and World War II ended. Together with it, the history of blitzkrieg came to an end. It is pleasant that it was the Red Army that was destined to put an effective end, proving that this tactic could be used not only by its inventors - the Germans. Moreover, the Soviet blitzkrieg turned out to be much more thoughtful and subtle than the German one.

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